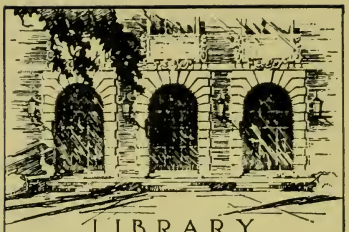
HARDING
THE
MONEY-SPINNER



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HARDING THE MONEY-SPINNER.

HARDING THE MONEY-SPINNER.

BY

MILES GERALD KEON,

AUTHOR OF "DION AND THE SIBYLS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HARDING THE MONEY-SPINNER.

CHAPTER I.

"The flaming seraph, fearless, though alone,
Encompassed round with foes, thus answered bold."
Paradise Lost.

"Genius and art, ambition's boasted wings,
Our boast but ill deserve. A feeble aid!
Dedalian enginery! If these alone
Assist our flight, fame's flight is glory's fall.
Heart merit wanting, mount we ne'er so high,
Our height is but the gibbet of our name."
YOUNG.

"Alack, the change! in vain I look
For haunts in which my boyhood trifled—
The level lawn, the trickling brook,
The trees I climbed, the beds I rifled."
PRAED.

CUTHBERT noticed that, even while declaiming against the pilgrimages made in

posthumous honour of Septimus Hodge, Doctor Harding's wary glance alighted on him repeatedly in lambent, threatening, momentary flashes. Fully roused by his mother's warning, he awaited the opening of the batteries so long masked. Every instant he said to himself, "Now it is coming!" And this brings us to the doctor's secret—to that powerful expedient in which he placed so much confidence, as a means of beating down the opposition of family or of friends to any of his favourite schemes.

As he was a clergyman, it will appear curious, incongruous, but it is literally true, that his great art consisted in a well-timed and judiciously-daring disregard of decorum. It is proverbially said—and, indeed, it is self-evidently clear—that between two antagonists pretty evenly matched, all collision must eventuate in favour of him who is ready to risk and to sacrifice the

most. Now, in the contests of his social or domestic diplomacy, the doctor was always ready to sacrifice more than his adversary, be the last who he might. One would go as far as throwing away his picked regiments; so would the doctor, and his reserves besides. Another would sacrifice his stores; so would the doctor, and the field baggage into the bargain. He never thought the same of Napoleon's genius after reading the true version of the battle of Borodino, where that great captain (stupefied by an influenza, and yielding to hypochondriac presentiments) left his own victory incomplete, by refusing to send his old, or even his young, guard in pursuit. "I must economise my guard," muttered Napoleon, under the cloud of a passing hallucination. "Fudge!" said the doctor; "economise his guard! What he economised was his success; that is what he stinted. He, for once, prized his means more than his end.

He ought to have paid with his guard; he ought to have expended all, all the instruments that were needed for a conclusive success, a crowning triumph. The Russians, even artistically speaking, deserved to drive him out of their country, for they were ready to risk and to sacrifice more than he was."

Now, the doctor was always ready to pay with his guard. In the contests which he maintained around him, to carry various objects, he sought to make his adversary confused—to overwhelm him with shame. The situations into which he dragged the opponent with whom he might have to wrestle, were morally painful—they were insufferable to almost everybody else. But to him, as the intended results of his own deliberate contrivance, they were simply flattering and agreeable.

"Hush, doctor!" his wife often said to him in the early and long abandoned strug-

gles of her married existence for the upper hand—"hush; the neighbours will hear us."

Well, if that consideration dismayed the lady, it did not dismay the gentleman; if that restrained her, if that induced her to resign the battle, why it was just what he reckoned on. If she would not value her victory at such a price, he would value his at even a higher—he would go all lengths—he would risk anything; he was deliberately desperate—he would pay with his guard, if necessary.

She could not disregard the ordinary decencies of their repute among the circles in which they moved; but the doctor disregarded everything, at present, as he assured her, in comparison with what he held to be his duty, or his right, in the question disputed between them; and, until she saw it was as he wished her to see it, he was bound to hold these tremors and

petty anxieties very cheap indeed. They were irrelevant, extraneous, idle.

"Well, there! there!" she would at last cry, "be it so. I don't want the whole world to be made a party to our discussion."

"Then, my love, you will not another time fly right in the teeth of your husband's plans," he would rejoin. There were occasions in which, had the doctor unfolded beforehand his projected measures, people would have said—

"Surely, that will be indelicate, reverend sir!"

"Just what he desired; he meant it to be indelicate, very indelicate, deucedly indelicate. Ay, and he would find some way of being more indelicate still, if people forced him. If they couldn't live in the storm into which he would lead them—be it known that he was the storm petrel."

Upon this principle, it will easily be felt what a master stroke he designed to aim at

Master Cuthbert's hardy crest. The first thing was to put that youth into some intolerably painful situation. The doctor promised himself that *he*, Doctor Marlowe Harding, would bear the pain of that situation with as much heroism as he once had borne the most cruel of all surgical operations, when performed by the untrembling hand of the late eminent Mr. Liston, upon a dear friend of the doctor's.

A profound silence followed the powerful invective against Mr. George Childering. It was broken by Cuthbert himself.

"And those post obits you mentioned, uncle," said he. "I suppose it was in London that the money for them was procured by Mr. George?"

"Not altogether," replied the doctor, peeling a fine pear. "Jack Brompton, who bought the little estate called the Limes, which adjoins my own parish, gave him a good portion of that fatal assistance. That

Brompton, William, is a curious character; do you ever see him now?"

"Very seldom; only when I chance to meet him on the parade at Leamington. He is too busy, making money. Besides, I rather avoid him, you know."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "no very desirable acquaintance, I allow. Still you remember what old Rothschild used to say, that the unlucky were the people to avoid. There is a class of persons, often very nice, very clever, very good, but who *are* unlucky, who never do succeed in anything. Fowell Buxton's memoirs tell us what a horror old Rothschild had of such characters."

"Yes," replied William; "he was indignant with them; he had no patience with them. By the rule of contraries, this Brompton is a man to know."

"Is he, then, very lucky?" inquired Cuthbert.

"Everything he touches turns to gold," said Mr. Harding. "He was a stable boy originally. He made a fortune, small or great, at Newmarket; then came back to this county (he is a Warwickshire man), and, to the surprise of old acquaintances, bade a high price for the Limes. There is never an auction of house or factory property which he does not attend within fifty miles round. He is the dread of intending purchasers."

"Why so?" asked Cuthbert.

"Because he knows within an ace the value of the property, and he will go nearer to that value in his bidding than anybody else dare."

"Pays with his guard," muttered Dr. Marlowe Harding.

"Eh, uncle?" said Cuthbert. "I missed what you said."

"I said he was a clever man, sir."

A singular thought flashed through Cuth-

bert's mind; this thought showed itself later; meanwhile, it is remarkable that he should have been struck so much as he was by the fact, that the individual under discussion was a constant frequenter of auctions, and a sagacious, a prosperous bidder.

"Have this Brompton's purchases at auctions always turned out well?" he inquired.

"Invariably," said his father. "His fame has become a proverb for that very circumstance."

"And he is known and notorious," continued Cuthbert, "for being a keen, money-making man?"

"Yes, well known, quite notorious," interposed the uncle, anticipating Mr. Harding, and looking towards Cuthbert with some surprise at the free, large share he took in the conversation, as well as at the interest he seemed to feel in this Brompton.

"He's not a man," persisted the youth, "to make a sacrifice for friends?"

"*Of* them, if you please," said the doctor. "But *for* them—he is beyond the reach of such a suspicion, sir."

"And why did you say you rather avoided him, father?"

"Well," said Mr. Harding, "I don't much like these favourites of Heaven and of old Rothschild. Besides, the man has grown deaf; he can hardly hear one's voice."

"His usurious conduct towards Mr. George Childering," remarked the doctor, "shows that he is so deaf, at least, as not to hear the still, small voice of conscience."

The general conversation dropped, and Cuthbert, catching the magnetic flash of his mother's anxious eye, and then darting an inquiring glance towards his uncle, said to himself, once more—"It is coming *now*."

This time he was right.

"Cuthbert," said the doctor, quietly,

amidst the profound silence of all the rest who were at table, "I return to *Panes cum Piscibus* to-morrow morning, and I do not know that I could have a better opportunity than this of speaking to you, in the presence of your family, respecting some points in your conduct which I consider impossible to pass over."

Geoffrey Mandeville half rose from his seat, and said—

"I think I may be in the way; I will retire—I——"

"By no means!" cried the doctor, in reply to this suggestion, which, it need scarcely be said, was prompted by Geoffrey's inborn and ever wakeful sense of delicacy, for he was thoroughly a gentleman. The doctor's object, however, was to combine as many indelicacies as possible in the situation. Geoffrey's presence was but an additional battery of artillery by which he counted upon overwhelming Cuthbert's self-

possession or assurance (if such impediments should be encountered), and fairly annihilating the poor lad's resistance.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Mandeville. You are Cuthbert's friend; his confidential friend, I have reason to believe." (The intercepted letter had alluded to Geoffrey as the only person, except Cuthbert's mother, cognizant of the engagement between the writer and Miss Whitsund.) "What I have to speak of is no secret. I dare say even that my nephew will be glad of your presence."

Geoffrey resumed his place in silence.

"Cuthbert, it was I who sent you to Eton," pursued Doctor Harding. "I had great hopes for you. I have received careful reports of your conduct, your studies, your progress in them. Your idleness has frustrated plans dear to my heart. I am disappointed in you!"

The doctor paused; Mr. and Mrs. Harding looked frightened, or humbled (Cuthbert

saw this); Miss Whitsund fully shared the awkwardness of the situation; she cast her eyes down, lest, by happening to look at Cuthbert, she might aggravate the disagreeableness of his position, and the confusion natural under such an unexpected address—or, rather, apostrophe. Little Winny nervously clutched her brother's hand under the table, and whispered—

"Cuth! Winny loves you, Cuth!"

As for Geoffrey Mandeville, after a furtive glance towards his friend, his handsome, open countenance became flushed to the roots of his hair, and he stared at Doctor Harding with an expression which it is impossible to describe.

"Cuthbert!" resumed Doctor Harding, "of your plans, of your settlement in life, we can speak another time. But there is one subject which will not brook delay. You are not born in the position of Mr. Geoffrey Mandeville: you are not one of

those young men in whom it may be accepted as an act of generosity that they should take another person's destiny and fasten it, so to speak, to their own. You are not one of those with whom it is an advantage to tie up another's fortunes for life. In *you* it is no kindness to say to an artless, inexperienced, helpless girl, you shall be mine! This is no favour in *you;* it is a perfidious, cowardly, and, above all, a cruel, a most unmerciful proposal. You do not offer immense benefits, as some might, but immense calamities. It is not for *you* to play off these grand airs, sir! To a few, Providence has granted a station which it is obviously kind in them to share with the almost portionless girl whom they may select. But you, sir, *you* bring ruin to her! For, however well you might force your own way without such an imprudence, commit it, and you doom to penury both yourself and the inveigled, cheated girl thus precluded

from all her legitimate chances. It is only for those who are hereafter to be great territorial princes, or otherwise secured in their future—it is not for lads like *you*—to take such a step with honour; to take it, I will say the word, without baseness. What sort of love is that which says to a poor girl, come and share my misery, my privations, my ruined life—ruined even by our very union itself? What sort of love is it which says this to a young lady, who otherwise could look forward to a brilliant destiny? What sort of love is it which says this clandestinely, furtively, thievishly!—and says it to the ears of her inexperience and simplicity, to the confiding heart of her childhood?—which abuses and betrays alike the blind, fond trust of an orphan's only protectors, and the guilelessness of the poor child herself? What name does such love merit?

"But this is not all!" cried the doctor,

in a voice of thunder, and with a glance, a play of countenance, worthy of Edmund Kean; "this is not all! May I not ask, with equal reason, what kind of love that youthful lady's would be, if she in return—when her maturer understanding was capable of passing judgment on the follies of her childish imagination—should, in no less degree, or, rather, in a greater degree, stand in the way of that youth's advancement as a fatal, an insuperable bar—if she should hang herself like a millstone round his neck, and sink him in the stormy sea of fortune—if she should blast his otherwise excellent chances, and blight all his prospects in life irreparably? According to my idea, this would betoken neither a becoming pride in herself, nor a true interest in his welfare!"

Doctor Harding paused, and ran his eye round a circle, in which there was only one person whose face did not exhibit a sort of consternation. With that exception, the

vexation and confusion were general. Miss Whitsund had, for a moment, seemed about to swoon; but, fascinated by the strangeness of the unexpected scene, spellbound by astonishment and curiosity, eager, above all, despite of her compassion, to see how Cuthbert would behave, she remained fixed in her place—an intent, although a suffering listener.

"On my word, sir," said Geoffrey, "you must excuse me, but this is a very painful —ahem—sort of thing for a stranger to be present at. You must suffer me to ret——"

"I pray you to remain," said the doctor, in a low, emphatic voice. "I have done."

But he had *not* done. His theory (beside the grand secret of his diplomacy, already analysed for the reader's information) was this: foolish lovers have hitherto, in general, been preached at in vain, because separately; so that each has held firm by thinking of the absent one, who is arrayed in fond or

in heroic colours, as the case may be. The thing to do, therefore, was to bring them together, and to make them look foolish in their own and in each other's eyes; to make them realize the contempt or pity of the larger world, by tearing them from their self-made microcosm, their own small ideal world; to gather into one short, palpable, present hour all the scattered coldness and involuntary compunctions of many a future year of disillusion and disappointment.

The doctor had *not* done. The youthful pair were under his blade, which had still to search their vitals. Emily's burning blushes were succeeded by a mortal pallor; she sat as far back from the table as was possible, without rendering the position conspicuous, instead of the contrary. Cuthbert's countenance, towards which she for an instant looked stealthily, was not pale, but livid. During his uncle's animadversions,

or rather philippic, the boy's eyes were, for the most part, cast down; it was only for brief intervals he looked at the speaker; but then an electric flash and a white heat seemed to dart from the uplifted glance. In all other respects it was clear he was master of the tempest within. An invincible composure maintained itself strangely above the excitement. He could, amidst the tempest of his feelings, whatever they were—

"Ride in the whirlwind and conduct the storm."

His aspect produced an undefinable impression upon Emily; she never afterwards forgot it. That look, not of amiable confusion, but of collected power, in the youthful face, that deeply thoughtful brow, amazed her more than it consoled or reassured. Mrs. Harding, who had expected to behold her poor boy overwhelmed by the doctor's unmerciful, unrelenting rhetoric, was even still more confounded by Cuthbert's strange self-possession, than she would

have been by any outburst of passionate emotion. Meanwhile, Mr. Harding, the father, in a kind of stupid and disagreeable trance, continued to crack the five knuckles of each hand in unceasing succession, looking alternately at the doctor, at Cuthbert, and at the ceiling.

The only person present who never once took eyes off Doctor Harding was Winny. She did not quite comprehend all his words; still less could she follow his allusions; but she felt that "Cuth" was on his trial, and that the prosecutor was Uncle Marlowe. Her little fingers, which Cuthbert had disengaged from his hand, had seized the lappet of his coat, which they grasped with a firmness which seemed to say, "I am determined not to leave you," while her face was turned away to listen to every word launched from Doctor Harding's sonorous mouth.

When the doctor had last paused, and

when Geoffrey was a second time prevented by him from retiring, a moment's nervous silence ensued, and so deep was it that the buzz of a fly, as it skimmed over the table, seemed painfully distinct.

"Yes," resumed Dr. Harding, solemnly, "such love, I may well say, would show neither maidenly pride in herself, nor common interest in him. But, suppose something more than all this; suppose that the youth who thus cruelly seeks to destroy the future of her who equally destroys his own, by a union which is not only ruin to themselves, but the regret, the disappointment, and the shame of both their families —suppose, I say, that this youth does not possess the love of this girl—suppose that he holds her childish word, indeed, but has no hold on her woman's heart, what would all decent, self-respect dictate then? How would his very sense of dignity prompt him to act in that case? What course would

even the interests of his hoped-for home (since he has no regard for the general interests of his position in life) urge him to pursue? What course but to give back to that girl her premature and inconsiderate promise, since it could not be ratified by her affections?"

Here, undoubtedly, at length, Cuthbert started, as if an adder had bitten him. He suddenly and rapidly sought Emily Whitsund's eye; but she was weeping, and her face was buried in her handkerchief.

"That is but little," pursued the relentless divine—"that is but little! Suppose that she not only does not and cannot love him, but actually loves another? What *then*?"

A half scream, and a series of convulsive, smothered sobs, broke the stillness of the pause which followed that terrible, pitiless, and all-revealing question. It need not be said who betrayed this agitation. This

time, Cuthbert did not look round. He looked deep into his own reflections and observations, and saw there, as in a mirror, things absent; saw far more than the material scene around would have disclosed to him.

"What," resumed the doctor, who felt highly flattered by that half scream, and those smothered sobs—"what should we think of either the reason or the morality of that young lady, if she should attach high importance to a silly promise which she had no right to make—made to a mere human being—but no importance at all to a promise to be made to the Almighty; if she should imagine herself bound by truth to a boy, to tell an untruth to Heaven?—if she should fancy it a duty to become sacrilegiously perjured—a duty, *her* duty, to forswear herself at the altar—if she should deem it right and necessary to vow solemnly before the All-seeing, that she loved one

person, when she loved another? What, *then*, I ask—what, *then?*"

The sobs redoubled. Exceedingly gratified, the doctor resumed:

"Such an engagement (worth nothing, because contracted between two persons, neither of whom had the least right to make it—not even the child gentleman, and still less the child lady)—exists? It must be dissolved. The honour, the interests, the proper self-respect, the most obvious dictates of a becoming pride, if they know what it is—the domestic safety and happiness of both these young persons, as well as all feelings of real regard for each other, imperiously require that engagement to be dissolved. It was made in folly: it would be consummated in ruin. It would cheat both the contracting parties of their future and their prospects; it would afflict and confound the families of each; it could not be carried out without impious perjury; there was no

right, no competency, to enter on it, and there would be grievous wrong and wickedness in maintaining it. I now and here declare that engagement dissolved, and I demand of my nephew, Cuthbert, that he honourably, and generously if you like, give back her stolen promise to the lady."

"Never!" said Cuthbert, in a low, but clear and ringing tone. "I am not satisfied that it is a crime to love. I am not satisfied that more is necessary to make a person competent to become bound by a voluntary promise, than just to understand the meaning of that which is promised. Whoever can be made answerable for a lie is competent to tell truth. I repudiate your authority, Uncle Marlowe, to declare an engagement dissolved which was never made to you. I did not seek for, and I am not responsible for, this cruel scene—not cruel to me, except indirectly, and because I can feel for the distress which I witness; but

most cruel to another. Beyond what I feel thus, I am not embarrassed, I am not ashamed, and, above all, I am not in any sense dishonoured. Concealment is not always a baseness: it may come from childishness, as you have hinted; and it may come from this—that one tells a plan to those who will help it, Uncle Marlowe, not to those who will oppose it. Concealment may also be a deference to another's embarrassment. *I* never feared you, Uncle Marlowe. I am sorry you are disappointed in me, because I have felt your kindness gratefully in sending me to Eton. But I the less regret not having learnt all that is taught there, since I have already seen more reason to regret my ignorance of what is *not* taught there. As to my prospects, there was, at least, no mystery about them. Yet I hope to make whoever marries me one day proud of her husband. From all I've ever read or heard, there's nothing more

uncommon than for people to end life as they have begun it. Look at that young gentleman whose wretched character, Uncle Marlowe, you only just now sketched! Mr. George Childering is an heir, yet, I fancy, you would back against his future that of the prospectless brother, Mr. Algernon. Learning, I confess, I have not made diligent progress in; but, of course, learning is good only for the learned professions, and not one of them would please me. I don't want them. I wouldn't try them! There's yourself, Uncle Marlowe, as good a scholar, I have heard say, as any in the Church of England—a first-rate man, in short, altogether, and still you are not a bishop!"

It is hard to give an idea of the effect which Cuthbert's collected reply, and unyielding, yet respectful manner, produced on the doctor; and, as to the two last remarks, their mingled daring and dexterity, and the singular coincidence which made

them both so very apt at that moment, took the reverend despot completely by surprise. It would not, however, answer to appear discomfited; his *prestige* or ascendant must be saved.

"Is this, then, your reply, boy?" he asked, with an awful and threatening calmness.

"Boy!" said Cuthbert. "There lies your mistake, uncle. I am young, and only beginning the outer life; but I perfectly know what it is to be answerable for my own conduct, and no one is asked by me to go halves in that responsibility. Boy! I detest boasting, but you force me to remind you that there is one present who can say whether I have any manliness in me or not. I think Mr. Geoffrey Mandeville saw very little of the boy or the child in me, when it was necessary to exert a man's forethought and a man's energy."

With all his readiness and vigour of

argument the uncle of Cuthbert received here a back fall, as it would be termed in wrestling. A silence of a moment or two ensued, during which two persons vainly sought their words—Geoffrey to support, and the doctor to crush, young Harding.

Before either of them spoke, a report of firearms was heard in the stillness of the conversational break. It seemed to be at some distance from the cottage. A second faint report followed almost immediately. The sound would not have been heard had the guests been speaking.

"Poachers, I suppose," said Geoffrey, glad of any interruption.

"Barely possible," remarked Mr. Harding; "they might be looking up a hare or so, but I have not much game in my neighbourhood—and the season, you know——"

"As likely some traveller," said Mrs. Harding, "who is attacked by those ma-

rauders of whom we have heard so much lately. Ought we not to send in the direction of the reports along the road?"

"Whom are we to send? Old Humphrey? I'd go myself, but——"

"And I," said Geoffrey.

"And I," said Cuthbert.

"If you go, Cuth, I'll go too," said Winny. "It will be such fun!"

"Be quiet, child, or you shall be sent to bed," said Mrs. Harding. "Let us listen!"

After a short pause, during which the sound was not repeated, Mr. Harding, a man who took most things as easily as he could, observed:

"It is not worth while taking any trouble. If it was those gentry, depend on it, they would be far enough from the place where the report was heard before we got there."

"They might," said Mrs. Harding, "but

not the poor person whom they have perhaps shot."

"Rich person, you mean," retorted Mr. Harding; "poor persons are safe enough from that kind of folk. But women are so romantic! It is nothing at all. The most that is shot is a hare."

Here the doctor, who had collected his ideas, observed:

"Well, you know best, William. But, to return to a grave subject, and to finish with it, have I your answer, Cuthbert?"

"You have, uncle!"

"Then you compel me to take steps which I had hoped to avoid."

This was said in order to cover his retreat with dignity. The doctor merely shook a vague terror, in quitting the field, over the head of the rebellious youth; but, in reality, he did not himself know what those steps were which he announced himself as being compelled to take. He had

"paid with his guard," and that guard had been as entirely insufficient for the end which he had intended to effect, as Napoleon's was at Waterloo. Doctor Harding now regretted that he had necessitated the presence of Emily and of Geoffrey at this painful conflict. Cuthbert, on the other hand, had felt at once that Miss Whitsund's opinion of him, whether she willed it or not, was at stake. His nerve, though severely tried by so unexpected an ordeal—(in which even the uncle's knowledge of the promise exchanged between him and Emily would have confounded most other lads, without all those ferocious and withering sarcasms against which he, unprepared, was called on to defend and bear up their engagement)—his nerve, I say, although most severely tried, had never failed him. One rankling and incurable wound he had got, indeed, in the merciless onslaught; he was

told that she not only had no love for him, but had given her love to another. And this was tossed in his face before his Eton friend, Mr. Geoffrey Mandeville, with whom he had rashly expatiated on the attachment which he had represented as uniting Emily Whitsund and himself. But, at least, he need not feel ashamed of his own bearing. Geoffrey and Miss Whitsund had not seen him either browbeaten or blustering. She might have forgotten all, even the summer strolls under the hawthorn hedge, but he had not forgotten himself.

Having still, he conceived, his part to play to the end, he determined to show that he was not "snuffed out." Assuming, therefore, a look of composure, he turned to his little sister, who had never deserted his elbow.

"Winny," said he, "by-the-by, I have a present for you from a young lady, who,

if ever you meet her, will put your nose out of joint!"

"What does that mean?" asked Winny, raising her hand involuntarily to the threatened organ, so maligned in her for its indentation.

"That she is far above you, Winny, in point of appearance—that she is very beautiful—what you will never be."

"I don't care?" cried poor Winny, tossing her head mutinously. "But where is the present? Show me!"

"Well, I left, as I dismounted, little Miss Henrietta Mandeville's present to you on the wall of the gateway leading into the stable yard, and I forgot to take it up again. It is a gigantic bouquet of magnificent flowers."

Winny darted away without a word. During her absence, the conversation reverted to the subject of the shot which

had been heard, Mrs. Harding "confessing" that she was not at all satisfied on that head, when, suddenly, Winny burst again into the room in a state of great excitement.

CHAPTER II.

"Still he beheld, nor mingled with the throng;
But viewed them not with misanthropic hate:
Fain would he now have joined the dance, the song,
But who may smile that sinks beneath his fate."

Childe Harold.

"Thus, Night! oft see me in thy pale career,
Till civil suited morn appear."

MILTON.

"WHAT is the matter, child?" cried Mrs. Harding. "Why do you rush into a room like that?"

"There's a gentleman in distress at the gate, and he says he wants a shoe," continued Winny, making big eyes, as the French have it, and plucking off, unconsciously, leaf after leaf of a splendid bouquet.

A moment's silence testified the striking, or, at least, enigmatical, character of this announcement; the little party at table exchanged glances of amusement. Geoffrey laughed loudly and outright. Even Emily Whitsund forgot the annoyance which she had been made to suffer, and smiled.

"Why how many shoes has he?" asked Mr. Harding.

"Only three, he says," cried she: "the horse can't get on any more without the other."

"Oh! the horse! You said, the gentleman!"

Mr. Harding rose, quitted the room, and, soon afterwards, returned, ushering in a gentleman with thin, sharp, clean-cut features, whom Geoffrey immediately recognized as Mr. Melcombe. Cuthbert remembered him as the person who had vainly tried to back Sir Walter's argument against Mr. Bradworth, by edging in a word

in favour of the principle at stake, and who had been told that a deposit, and not the principal, was required in the first instance.

After the civilities of recognition and introduction respectively—

"I ought to have been here two hours ago," said Mr. Melcombe; "but my horse cast a shoe somewhere about Heron Moss; I was obliged to dismount, and walk very slowly. There is no forge near, is there?"

"Not nearer than three miles," returned the master of Lea Meadows; "but the first thing to-morrow morning——"

"Ah, thank you," said Mr. Melcombe, "That will not suit me. I have received a telegraphic despatch which obliges me to be in London the first thing to-morrow. The mail train passes Throstledale at half-past two this night, and I want to go up by it to town. If I may trespass so far on your kindness, Mr. Harding, will you

send back to Sir Walter's the horse which has *not* brought me—and, in case you cannot lend me another, I must walk to Throstledale to-night."

"As to that," said Mr. Harding, "you are welcome to my nag; but would you venture? Is it safe to travel the roads at night, just now?"

"Safe or not, I must go. There is a Cabinet at one to-morrow, from which I ought not to be absent. But I can testify to the insecure state of the country from personal experience this night."

"Then you heard those shots?"

"I was stopped by the first of them, and I, myself, fired the second, not very far from here. There were two men—only two, I believe, and I don't think they intended any unnecessary violence. Shortly after the hack had fallen lame, I saw these gentry, or their shadows, planted right before me, at about a dozen yards. One

of them carried a double-barrelled gun; the other, nothing but a bludgeon—so far as I could discern. The man with the gun called on me to stop and 'shell out,'—'you see we can force you!' cried he, firing his piece. 'I have still another barrel for business,' he added; 'that's just to make you wise.' And, to tell the truth, it was clear, from the elevation of the weapon, that he had not aimed at me."

"What did you do?" said Dr. Harding.

"Well, I prepared to 'shell out,' as I had been commanded," replied Mr. Melcombe. "I don't know," he added, with a smile, "that my shooting licence includes the right to fire at two-footed, unwinged game; but, since these recent outrages, I have taken the liberty—(I say this among friends, for it would not be very edifying in a member of the Government to be cited as a deliberate breaker of the law)—I have taken the liberty of not going out at night

without accidentally, and by pure good luck, carrying a revolver, one of the nipples of which I want to get mended, you know. So I said to my man who had *not* aimed at me—'Let this go over your head, friend, for your civility in firing high. It is but the first bullet from a revolver, and I still carry four men's lives in my hand; you see I, too, can do some business, as you call it.' They stood a moment whispering together, and then the hero of the gun burst out laughing, and declared that I was 'game.'"

Doctor Marlowe Harding, who never omitted the opportunity of a pun, here exclaimed—

"Well, they had been *making* game of you."

"Very nearly," pursued Mr. Melcombe. "I said, 'thank you for your good opinion,' and begged them to sheer off into the fields, and to be sure that both of them took the

same side. This they did, to the left, and I continued my journey as fast as I could get the nag to walk, putting myself on the other, or right, side of her."

"It is a mercy," said Mr. Harding, "that they did not try that new method of attack which has come into vogue—stealing behind you and garotting you before you know where you are."

"It is so," answered Mr. Melcombe, "but that is more easily done in a large city, where slight sounds do not attract your attention, than in the country, where the faintest rustle, the stir of a pebble under the foot, the creaking of a branch in the hedge, or any unexpected noise, makes a man look round."

"And pray, Mr. Melcombe," said Mrs. Harding, "after such an adventure, how can you hazard a journey alone to the Throstledale station, the very same night?"

"The very same night!" he cried, gaily

—" that is just the thing: I have paid the debt to Fate for this night, at all events. It would be next to a miracle if I were stopped again before morning. Such quick iterations of the unusual don't happen to us, or the idea unusual would lose its meaning. You know what the French soldier says, when a bullet in battle goes very near killing him, but doesn't, and when it doesn't in the slightest degree even hurt him—when it rips up the saddle under him, or clips off a love lock, or shaves one side of the face, singeing it bare, as we sometimes do a horse's coat?"

"What does he say?"

"That he is safe for that day, at least. That destiny has called on him for its tax, and taken a bill for the amount."

"What a curious idea!"

"There is something in it, too," pursued the statesman; "and I'll tell you what I have noticed, however unaccountable it may

appear: each of us has his peculiar class of liabilities, and enjoys a pretty constant immunity from other sorts. One man is always in ill health; another is always in ill luck about pecuniary matters—he has only to join a business speculation to smash it, you don't know how. Another fares badly in love; another is tormented in his home, although whatever he undertakes in external business prospers. I was only the other day saying to poor Stoneleigh, the late member for the shire, 'How wonderfully well you invariably are, Stoneleigh — what high spirits!' 'Yes,' said he, 'when not in positive torture; you wouldn't envy me, if you knew how strangely doomed I am to dangerous mishaps. I am always meeting with accidents! Out of the last four and twenty years there aren't two which haven't brought me a broken bone, a contusion of the skull—in fact, something in that line.' 'Nonsense,' said I to Stoneleigh. 'Never,'

replied he, solemnly, 'get into a railway train with me, if you can help it. I have been in six collisions, and in nine other accidents of different kinds. It seems as if they expressly waited for me—were on the look-out for me. Never get into a vessel at sea with me. I have been only ten voyages altogether, and seven of them ended in shipwreck; the other three were very angry and stormy. I enjoy amazing health and spirits—but don't come yachting with me. There's Sir Robert, now, wants me to go yachting with him. I shouldn't wonder if something happened—on my word, I shouldn't.'

"That conversation," continued Mr. Melcombe, "occurred between me and poor Stoneleigh only just before he set out upon the excursion to which he alluded; you know the sequel; he, poor fellow, his wife, his two children, and even their lady's maid, all gone; the rest saved."

"It was queer, was it not?"

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Harding, "if you could put off your business in town——"

"Impossible, my dear sir!"

"Well, I'll order the horse for you; and, meanwhile, you can take a glass of wine; you'll oblige us, at least, with half an hour of your society. After your encounter with footpads and the fatigue of your walk, the repose will do you no harm."

Mr. Harding went out accordingly to give directions, and the new comer, who had taken his seat at the table, helped himself to a glass of wine.

Cuthbert had never met a man of greater influence or importance than Mr. Melcombe, who was not only a Cabinet member of the existing Government, but the most brilliant orator belonging to it in the Lower House. His speeches, indeed, had made his fame, and the fame his position. He was con-

nected with the War Department, but was outvoted in the Cabinet, he thinking that the military organization of the country required sweeping changes. Cuthbert's instinct attracted him towards such persons. He would be glad to oblige them.

"Since you are bent on going to Throstledale to-night, Mr. Melcombe," said he, "and since you have yourself found the insecurity of the way, perhaps a companion on the road would be welcome. I should be delighted to go with you. Those fellows would not molest two, where they might attack one."

"Many thanks for the offer, but I shan't be attacked, I feel certain. I cannot imagine, as I have said, that such a thing should occur twice in the same night to the same person. If I did need an escort," he added, smiling, "I could not wish for a more courageous comrade. Sir Walter and I were talking of you to a very remarkable

person, who came after you and Geoffrey here had so abruptly departed; we thought you would be just the one to lead a forlorn hope."

"I shouldn't like the army at all," said Cuthbert, "as a profession."

"Ah! that is just it," replied Mr. Melcombe. "I have influence enough at the Horse Guards to procure a commission; but I said to Sir Walter, who was hinting the subject, that perhaps your father"—(Mr. Harding had by this time returned, and was listening to the conversation)—"or you yourself might have other views. By-the-by, I have a note for you, Mr. Harding, of which Sir Walter did not wish to make your son himself the bearer, and which he would have sent over to you to-morrow, only I said I should be passing here to-night. I meant to have merely dropped it at the gate in the hands of your servant; but my horse had dropped something else first, this

lucky shoe, which has procured me the pleasure of your acquaintance."

He then handed the letter to Cuthbert's father, who thanked him, and put it down beside his own plate without opening it.

"And may I ask," resumed Mr. Melcombe, perusing Cuthbert with that glance which had so often read men, "why you would dislike the army as a profession?"

"Well, for one thing, it is a rather poor investment," said Cuthbert, hesitatingly.

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Melcombe, in a very low tone, and again looking at the young man. "Money is certainly very powerful. Probably, too, you would prefer some of what may be termed the business callings to any of the learned professions."

"Yes," said Cuthbert.

"Well," returned the other, "you may command my good wishes and good word, if any circumstances should arise in which you think I can be of service."

"Thanks, Mr. Melcombe," said Cuthbert. "I shall remember your kind offer."

Then, after a pause, he said:

"Who is the remarkable person you say arrived at the Park after Geoffrey and I had quitted it? It seems a late hour for any arrival."

"Sir Walter may thank you, Mr. Cuthbert, for the late arrivals," answered the statesman. "Of three persons quite out of the number who were to have met as politicians, none but Mr. Bradworth—whose views about certain railway schemes we wished to hear—had been invited. But Mr. Bradworth, it seems, had agreed to receive the horse which he had bought of Mr. Childering from that gentleman at the town of Huntingferry, and to deliver it to another at Mandeville Park. Mr. Bradworth himself could not have expected to find the animal produced in the manner he was, nor could Mr. Childering. This last

followed where you had led the way; a letter and a messenger afterwards brought Prince L——, who is an old acquaintance of Sir Walter's. A wonderful man that prince —sure some day to play a great part!"

"That is not the general opinion, I believe?" observed Doctor Harding.

"Why, no," said Mr. Melcombe; "but it is mine."

He now looked at his watch, and, being informed by his host that the nag was ready, he took his leave.

That he was not garotted that night appeared from a brilliant speech which he made, the next evening, in the House of Commons.

Mrs. Harding, having retired with Miss Whitsund, taking Winny, and wishing the gentlemen good-night, Mr. Harding, with an apology to Geoffrey, opened and read Sir Walter Mandeville's letter, handing it then in silence to his brother, the doctor.

Cuthbert felt that this letter referred to him. The doctor made no comment on it, but shortly afterwards said—

"A glass of wine, nephew. I spoke harshly to you, but I spoke for your good."

Cuthbert bowed, and said to himself, as he sipped his glass, "That letter, at the least, makes much of me—perchance, offers to do much for me."

"Did I understand you rightly, that I might hope for a short interview at seven to-morrow morning, in the bridle path?" he had asked of Miss Whitsund, in a whisper, before she retired.

Her answer, in the same low tone, had been—

"I cannot meet you in that manner, but I will write to you in a few days."

The gloom produced by this reply was yet on his countenance, when—

"Cuthbert," whispered Geoffrey, "I wonder you did not fling the decanter at the doctor's head, upon his asking you to take wine? I feel as if I could still do it for you—eh? But you're a trump, old fellow; you are, on my honour!"

"Thanks, dear Geoffrey. He hit hard, and cruelly, I grant."

"'Tisn't what I call fair hitting, either," returned Geoffrey, "but you stood it admirably. Let that comfort you!"

"Not fair hitting," murmured Cuthbert, abruptly; "not fair hitting, you say. It was stabbing, man!"

Geoffrey groaned audibly and clenched his fists.

"Will you do me the favour, Mr. Geoffrey Mandeville," said, at this of all moments, the deep, full voice of the divine, "to take a glass of wine with me?"

"Sir!" cried Geoffrey, his eyes blazing,

and his face vermilion, "I'm under your nephew's roof, but if he is your nephew, I am proud to say he is my friend—and—I'll be hanged if I can!"

CHAPTER III.

"See what a grace was seated on his brow:
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, to threaten or command;
A station, like the herald Mercury,
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
A combination, and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man."

SHAKSPEARE.

"'Tis true that we are in great danger:
The greater, therefore, should our courage be."

SHAKSPEARE.

CUTHBERT'S room, in that eccentrically built old cottage, was inside Geoffrey's. At an early hour in the morning Geoffrey, who was a light sleeper, was awakened by the noise of a stealthy footstep, and, rubbing

his eyes, he saw his friend, fully dressed, stealing across the apartment. Before he could call, the figure had passed through the door.

"It must be time to get up," thought Geoffrey; and he proceeded to do as he thought.

When he had got down stairs, however, he found nobody astir. Geoffrey was one of those with whom time hangs very heavy when alone, unless the body be vigorously employed. He could not think of leaving Lea Meadows without saying good-bye to any one, or he would have been inclined to have sought his horse and taken his departure at once. But this would have been neither courtesy nor good feeling, and so he determined to stroll about the grounds until he should guess it to be breakfast time.

It has been said that the lawn was small, and that it was skirted by the public road.

This road cut in two a plantation which, on the one side, partly fringed the cottage, and partly covered the flank of a rather steep hill on the opposite side of the highway. Through the plantation wound a footpath, which began at a door leading from the garden behind the house, continued its way through the grove around the side, and reached the road. There a little painted wooden gate, always on the swing, corresponded with another gate of the same kind across the way, which second gate opened on a prolongation of the footpath through the plantation. The two little gates, thus making mouths at each other, or rather at the road between them, seemed to say, as plainly as gates could, "notwithstanding this intruder of a highway, we form only one plantation and one footpath."

Nevertheless, there was this difference between them, that the one nearer the cottage was a strictly private way, while the other,

which took up business beyond the high road, served pedestrians as a short cut over the hill already mentioned, from a certain point in that high road to the further of the two little gates ; or again, from this last to the point in question, as the case might be. The road made, in and out, two miles round, and the stile path only one mile across, besides the pleasantness of the fields and trees. Nobody, therefore, not belonging to the cottage, was ever found in the hither half of the plantation ; anybody might chance to meet anybody in the other.

Geoffrey had got upon the road, and, lounging forward, he neither knew nor cared whither, was hesitating if he should pursue the broader track, or accept the more coy invitation of the byeway, and enter the grove by the gate, when he heard the branches rustle in the plantation, and then a quick step upon the gravel.

In a moment afterwards, a young man,

of most striking appearance, stood in the road before Geoffrey. Notwithstanding a certain carelessness in his dress, thick shoes, and a jaunty, foreign-looking cap, somewhat "rakishly stepped," as sailors would say, it was impossible to mistake him one instant for anything but a born gentleman; and, indeed, more. Much more, because to be a gentleman born is not always to be a gentleman bred; nor to be this last, to look it. But there could be no doubt about the youth who now confronted Geoffrey, and this was precisely our friend Geoffrey's first mental conclusion. His second thought had been —not the second, but the first—of one or two early damsels, bound kinewards with their pails, whom the still earlier pedestrian had passed near a few homesteads in his rapid cross country ramble—it was this: "well *he* is good looking, if you like."

They were no ordinary good looks his. A slight, slim, elastic figure—not tall, but

just a little above the middle height—suited admirably the easy bearing and the springy step. The eye was large, luminous, and grey, but well shaded by the long lash and the thick, smooth arch of the brow, both of which gave a darker hue than the hair. He had the head of a Greek god, or rather of a youthful David; and the oblique light of the climbing sun, which at that early hour, burned golden through the top of the grove behind him, would have helped the illusion, for a ray came playing, like some nimbus, into the wavy, yet close lying, auburn lock which escaped from the stranger's cap where he stood.

Although scarcely above the middle height, as has been stated, the whole form breathed strength, energy, and action, and gave the impression of even a physical hardihood far beyond what you would assign to that deformed species of vigour which is developed by certain handicrafts. The smith

has a brawny arm—yet the smith would think twice ere lifting it against that slim adversary. He seemed, with his fair, open brow, not more than eighteen, but he was just twenty-one.

The light of the morning sun was in Geoffrey's eyes, and the stranger, therefore, was beforehand with him, in point of recognition.

"Why, Geoffrey," said he, "you don't seem to remember your friends. Who would have thought of meeting *you* here."

"Oh! Mr. Algernon Childering!—it is you, I declare."

"No, it is not; it is not Mister. It is your friend, Algernon. How is little Henrietta? Well, I see by your face. What place is this, Geoffrey? A pretty cottage!"

"Don't you know? This is Lea Meadows, where the Hardings live."

"Ah, indeed! I did not know. I am not acquainted with Mr. William Harding, al-

though I am with his brother, the clergyman. Mr. William doesn't come into society."

"Well, the clergyman himself is here now, with that beautiful creature, his ward, Miss Whitsund."

"What! Emily here too!" cried the stranger, with a look of surprise.

"He calls her by her Christian name," thought Geoffrey. He then said aloud—

"Yes; if you'll wait, I'll ——"

"No—many thanks—you see my rod. I'm going to your father's; I thought you were there. I shall fish a little, lunch a little, and then walk back."

"You won't have walked a little, at least. Why, you must have risen early!"

"Oh! the sun is a sluggard compared to me," replied young Childering; "I generally catch him with his cloudy nightcap on. Learnt the habit on the scorching stretches of what they call 'the plain' in French

Africa. I was losing it, when I learnt it again, bear hunting in Finland. So, having been first burnt into me, and then frozen into me, it is now duly tempered, tattooed into the very fibres of my daily life. But, Geoffrey, how do you happen to be here?"

"Came with young Harding last night; he was my chum at Eton."

"And what brings Doctor Harding and Em—— I mean, Miss Whitsund?"

"You say you know him," replied Geoffrey; "wait till breakfast, then, and I'll introduce you to the brother."

"No; I expect a letter from Dr. Harding. I don't want to see Em—— I don't want to see him till I get it. There is a reason; a business matter. But, hark you, Geoffrey—since you seem to know these parts, can you tell me who and what is the maniac in the plantation?"

"A maniac in the plantation!"

"I think so," returned young Childering, "to judge from his wild gestures and incoherent language. As I crossed the stile at the top of the hill, leading into the wood, I heard a voice utter a horrible blasphemy. Looking in the direction of the voice, I saw a young fellow, his face half turned from me; he was very pale, his hands were clenched, his arms lifted horizontally before him; I should know him again; but he did not see me—and as I passed on quickly, I heard him mutter to himself in a hissing tone, as like snake talk as a human being's can be——"

"Snake talk!" interrupted Geoffrey, laughing boisterously.

"Yes," resumed the other. "Depend on it, snakes think that we hiss, and that we have no articulate language; but after a moment of this snake talk, as I tell you, my youth comes out between his teeth with something less incomprehensible to us

humans. It was good English, any way, although not very good morals. 'I'll have his life!' quoth he."

"Whose life?" demanded Geoffrey, shocked and in astonishment.

"Ah! that is the point. Not being a wizard, can't say. But the words were sufficiently remarkable to make me look well at the individual: gentlemanly fellow, thin-lipped, darkish, sallowish, handsomish; light grey frock coat, something like mine, only cloth."

"Why, that must be——" interrupted Geoffrey, and then stopped short, staring thoughtfully at Algernon.

"You were saying," observed the latter—"yes—who?"

And the stranger played negligently with his rod, but fixed a keen eye on Geoffrey.

"Only that he's not mad, I can tell you," said the latter.

"Oh, very possibly," returned Algernon;

"mustn't judge always by appearances, you know. But, in fine, who?"

"Well, I should say, Cuthbert—young Harding, that is."

The stranger was buried in thought for a moment, and then said—

"He used to be a playfellow of Em—— of Miss Whitsund's, I believe, when both were children?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, "and——"

Here he remembered in time that he had no business to divulge his friend's secret. He, accordingly, looked foolish, and stopped short.

"Oh! there is the very individual," said, in a low tone, the stranger, averting his own face, while drawing Geoffrey's attention to a figure which, at that moment, appeared slowly descending the pathway in the wood.

On seeing a stranger with Geoffrey, the figure halted, hesitated, and then deliberately

turned into a transverse path which bisected that leading from the little gate.

"That is Cuthbert," said young Mandeville.

The stranger silently pursued, for a moment, the retreating figure with a glance of interest. Then, after a few words of no bearing on our story, Geoffrey said—

"Is that true about the affray with midnight marauders at Childering Hall—and your gamekeeper's being wounded?"

"Yes," replied Algernon. "Poor Gilbert! his recovery was despaired of at first, but he is coming round (he did not add to whom it was due that he was coming round). Well, good morning, Geoffrey; I shall continue my stroll."

"Good morning. I am glad of Gilbert's recovery," said Geoffrey. And Algernon, shaking hands, walked swiftly along the highway in front of the cottage, the living image of youthful energy and beauty.

"Who was that you were speaking with?" asked young Harding, when Geoffrey had overtaken him in the plantation.

Geoffrey told him.

"I wish I had known," said Cuthbert. "You have told me so much about him, I should have been curious to see him. A sort of singing, painting, drawing-room fellow, I take it! As little of classical knowledge, at least, as Uncle Marlowe finds in me."

"Hum!" said Geoffrey.

"What does 'hum' mean? Don't be oracular," said Cuthbert.

"I was thinking," returned the other, good humouredly, "that your uncle, on the contrary, gave him quite the other character, last night, when he was telling me about Oxford. Doctor Harding even made some pun about him; let me see—he called Algernon the ripest scholar, of his years, that he knew."

"Why, that's no pun, good Geoffrey! Probably, my uncle said, 'of his age.' He's fond of his pun, and of his glass, and of his scold, and of his bishopric to be. Well, this fellow is a scholar, then—be it so! One of your bookworms, I suppose; can't do anything out of doors; can't fence, can't ride!"

"Can't he, though?" observed Geoffrey. "Why, it was he broke that horse of his father's, which you rode so gloriously from Huntingferry. He asked his father to allow him."

"Very ill he broke him then," said Cuthbert. "But it must have been ticklish riding to begin on him, I grant."

"And I'll tell you what," pursued Geoffrey; "he's the very deuce, in spite of his good looks, and fair face, is Algernon. I've heard my father say that, when he was at Lyons, eighteen months ago, an officer, who was held to be one of the best swords

in the French army, said something impertinent, you know, about the English ladies, and all that sort of thing; and, by Jove, Algy called him out, and they weren't at it for two minutes before Algy whipped the rapier twenty feet high out of the Frenchman's hand."

"Do you know of whom you are speaking thus to me?" said Cuthbert, with sudden fierceness. "I'll tell you, then, Geoffrey. You are aware of the engagement between Emily Whitsund and myself. Now, this very person, this Algernon Childering, takes advantage of my absence at Eton, and worms himself into the affections of a girl who has plighted her word to another. Do you call that fair? And now all the aim of both my uncle and the lady is to get me to release her! You witnessed the shameful scene of last night. It was not for such an end, dear Geoffrey, I asked you to Lea Meadows. Very different was the greeting

I had foolishly expected! But," continued he, with returned fierceness, "in the first place, no release for this lady! In the second place, they shall find yet that the match they think so disadvantageous for Miss Whitsund, will have that about it which alone is really prized by nearly all I meet, by the whole world. I feel already differently towards this weak, this treacherous girl. She shall *not* be set free to turn me into derision; never! But I now see what she is worth. Yet, to love her as I do, and to hate her also——"

He stopped, grinding his teeth; and Geoffrey was literally appalled by the expression which his countenance assumed.

"She would not even give me the private interview which I demanded for this morning. No—she will write! Has she not given *him* private interviews? I'll have his life."

"He heard you say so, Cuthbert," observed Geoffrey, "as he came just now through

the wood. But he could not know what you meant, or whom you were speaking of. Don't talk in this way. If you had his life it wouldn't be worth so much to you as it is to him. Besides, either the lady loves him or she doesn't. If she does, she wouldn't like you the better for killing him, you know; and if she does not, you'd have killed him for nothing."

Young Harding appeared to be struck by his friend's common sense.

"I was speaking at random," replied he, despondently; "I think I am haunted. It is horrible!"

Geoffrey Mandeville felt dissatisfied with this precipitate penitence.

Suddenly, young Harding, who had seemed, for a few moments, much absorbed, started slightly, and, turning to his friend, asked, with a hesitating manner, and in a faint voice—

"Did you laugh, Geoffrey?"

"Not I," replied young Mandeville; "but, now I think of it, Cuthbert, that is not the first time you—you——"

He interrupted himself on observing his companion's countenance, and inwardly said—"There is something very odd about all this!"

Cuthbert reddened, and changed the whole conversation, while Geoffrey mentally resolved that he would find some more welcome opportunity—some better mood, humour, temper, of his friend—to question him in the manner which curiosity (gradually awakened) was beginning to urge.

* * * * *

"I wonder," said Algernon Childering to himself, as he followed the windings of that pretty country road between the fragrant hedges—"I wonder why the doctor should take her to make this visit, before he writes to me? I could see that he approved of my intended proposal, and I feel that *she* cares

for me. Stay! what could that mysterious obstacle to her accepting me be, except some foolish engagement of her childhood, better broken off beforehand? And with whom but with this same early companion, this identical young Harding? He seems, poor fellow, to be in no very blissful mood. I can feel for him. What could he have meant by 'I will have his life?' Was it *my* life?"

CHAPTER IV.

"The ill men do we may compute
But wha knows what's resisted?"
BURNS.

"Strike—but hear me."
THEMISTOCLES.

"I WILL not believe it, sir," said Cuthbert, about a week afterwards to his uncle, who had sent for him—"I will not believe it, unless the lady herself tells me so."

"Then by—ehem!" cried that fiery and reverend gentleman—"you had nearly made me unclerical—but the lady herself *shall* tell you so." And, leaving the room, he presently returned with Miss Whitsund.

"Ask her the question yourself," said the doctor, coarsely.

"Emily," said Cuthbert, "do you wish to be set free from your promise to me?"

The young girl seemed to suffer excruciating mental distress; but, after some hesitation, she replied—

"It would not have occurred to my own mind to ask this of you, Cuthbert; nor should I fear, if wedded to you, that I could not love you as a wife ought. Yet we are not thus bound to each other now, and—and—I do not——"

"You do not love me, you would say!" exclaimed Cuthbert.

She evaded the harshest form of assent, and answered—

"I feel for you all the friendship and—and tenderness which one who has never had sister or brother must feel for the companion of her childhood, her earliest, her dear, playfellow."

"But you love another!" said Cuthbert.

"Surely your manner," said she, with

dignity, "exceeds any right which the past can give to Mr. Cuthbert Harding!"

"How can you possibly think so?" exclaimed Cuthbert. "I am true and constant to a promise from which you, less faithful, appeal to my generosity to deliver you. You—or, at least, my uncle—would have me make a sacrifice of the most painful kind to enable *you* to be happy! Suppose I were to ask a more natural sacrifice at your hands, in order that *I* may not be wretched? Is the question anything else save this—whether *I* shall surrender a love sanctioned by troth exchanged, or *you* a love violating it?"

"Cruel, cruel!" cried Miss Whitsund, overwhelmed by that brief-speaking, powerful intellect, more fairly matched in masculine conflict, than thus against a girl.

The doctor showed signs of wrathfully coming to the rescue. But now, Cuthbert's whole mind, in the swing of great emotions,

and at white heat with a twofold passion, was too much for the trained paces of even that weighty arguer.

"Let me say out, uncle," he continued. "You sent for me to hear me. Hear me, then. This scene excruciates Emily; it was none of my seeking. You have talked of her not having known her own mind; I believe it is at this moment that she does not know it. I believe that you have first ensnared, and then bewildered, her. I believe that Emily is true at heart, and the promise you demand I will hold steadfastly. You have done all that mortal wit could suggest to make me ashamed of this promise; well, fix it deeply in your mind, uncle, I am *not* ashamed of it. I am proud of it, I glory in it, it is a crown to me; it is like that crown of the Lombards of which Pepin said, 'Let him beware who touches it!'"

"Enough, sir, enough," cried Doctor

Harding, "your consent is not necessary. I was merely anxious to give you the opportunity of a graceful act. You have thrown it away. You will find that we can do without you."

Cuthbert made no reply. He rose, bowed to the lady, gazed fixedly at the gentleman, and left the rectory.

"Of course, my love," said the divine to Emily, "had this foolish young man acted properly, it would have been more satisfactory to all parties. But it does not matter. I am cut to the heart, my sweet child" (he here seemed to be really moved) "to have the ill chance of dragging you through so many painful scenes."

Her tears fell fast.

"Courage!" he continued, after a pause. "All this is over. You have received a proposal which, in every point of view, has my sanction. You will, of course, accept Mr. Childering?"

"And the engagement?" faltered she.

"Is worth nothing. It was beyond your right to make it; it would be wrong in you to keep it. What does your aunt say?"

"She says as you do."

"There! You see all persons of right mind would think the same."

"No! *he* feels what I feel."

"Who, Cuthbert? Bah! he is blinded by his passion."

"No, not Cuthbert; Algernon."

"Algernon! What do you mean?"

"Read his letter."

The doctor glanced over as impassioned an offer of the heart and hand as ever youth addressed to beauty and to goodness; but, to his ineffable surprise, found that it ended in these words:—

"If I write to you, not without hope, I write in great terror, also. Something has seemed to give you a pang when you have observed the love I feel; is it com-

passion for me? Oh, I need it; it is too much happiness to hope that your heart, *even if free*, could be given to Algernon; and if, perchance, some positive obstacle exists, I have no right to explanations; torture not your pity to give them. Should indifference to me dictate a refusal, say not the reason; I can too easily believe it. Should honour command it, I would be the first to cry, 'Spare me not!' I stoop my own head to the blow.

"ALGERNON CHILDERING."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the doctor; "that's not ordinary human nature."

"No—not ordinary," said his beautiful ward, her lips quivering, and a deadly paleness overcasting her face.

"Take a little time," said the doctor, contemplating her with anxiety, "before you answer that letter, my dear child. *He* will make you happy."

She said nothing, but slowly and languidly retired.

"She will accept him," muttered Cuthbert to himself, as he returned, in gloomy thought, to Lea Meadows. "Well, be it so. She is not my first, nor my primary, object in life. There are things—ay, there are things—for which I would give her up—things for which I would fling her out of my hand. If I thought this union could stand in the way of my advancement—if I thought it could block the path, or clog my action—I would —I would——"

He was speaking aloud, but he did not finish this sentence aloud. He compressed his lips, and brought down his clenched hand upon his thigh as he rode.

"But that is no reason," he pursued, "for allowing myself to be fooled and sacrificed at pleasure. And first, for this Mr. Perfection."

He had hardly uttered the words, when

the colour left his countenance. He looked back; he looked on every side of him; and, in order to do so more effectually, he pulled up his horse, which stood stock still, its skin shivering, every now and then, with a sudden and violent shudder.

The beautiful, peace-breathing English landscape lay around, hushed in perfect repose. No human figure was visible.

"Am I deranged?" muttered the rider—"or, gracious Heavens! is it truly and really an external thing which lurks at hand—which attends me—which follows me—which can hear what I say—nay, can hear my very thoughts, as they pursue their voiceless orbits in the mind itself? Is it, then, no delusion? Is it some veritable——? Again?"

Drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

When he reached home, he hastened to his own room, and, locking himself in, placed pen, ink, and note paper before him.

After hurriedly writing one or two notes, and then tearing them up, he pondered for a long time, and finally satisfied himself with a letter, which he folded, sealed, and addressed to—

Algernon Childering, Esq.,
Childering Hall.

Messenger to wait.

CHAPTER V.

"Endure and shrink not—we, of nobler clay,
May temper it to bear; it is but for a day."
Childe Harold.

It was evening. An elderly and a young man were seated in the bow window of the dining-room at Childering Hall. The elder seemed all spirits, like youth; the younger as spirit-broken as age. The elder was the father of Algernon Childering. But who was the younger? Not Algernon, surely; not Algernon, glittering with intellect, and gay with the sanguine consciousness of victorious powers; not Algernon, whose buoyant air was but the impress of the buoyant mind, overflowing with hope, brilliant of look, brilliant of word.

"Algernon," said the elder, "it is not the cheers you raised at the time, but the lasting impression you have left, which most delights me. See! here are heaps of letters, all singing the same song—all congratulating me about you—all filled with your praises. You are cut out for public life. I'll answer for your career."

A pause, and a low, fluttering, nearly imperceptible little sigh, from the young man.

"Yes," resumed the elder; "it is almost an unprecedented course for a father to beg the constituents who have returned him to four parliaments in succession—and who would still return him to a fifth—to transfer their confidence, not to his eldest son, but to the younger. Yet, if the eldest abjure public life—if he be totally unfit for it—if he be the shame, instead of the pride, of all who belong to him—ah! Algy, you have consoled me for *him*. Never an act or word

from you that gave me grief! But this success, I say, Algy, this success—I cannot get it out of my head. Much as I expected of you, you've exceeded my fondest hopes. Work, and the love of work are in you, my dear boy; no hollow make-believe, no sham; no silly presumption that anything worth a straw can be effected without hard striving. What Frenchman was it that said, 'patience was genius?' You took that very sentiment to your little heart when you were not that high. Stick to it. It will carry you far. Here come the economists nowadays, and inform us that wealth is labour; that everything of value represents labour. It is no discovery; it is as old as the expulsion from Paradise."

He paused suddenly, and changed both his theme and his tone.

"Come, show a brave heart, Algernon. You are knocked down by suspense. You don't listen to me. Be brave, be yourself!

The lady will accept you; I'm sure she will. I want to divert your mind."

"Yes," said Algernon, "I am diverted—I am grateful—I am attending to you. I am not thinking of the answer to my proposal. There is the messenger!" added he, with a start, and becoming white as a sheet.

"Come in," said the father, and a servant entered with two letters on a little silver tray. Both were addressed to Algernon. One was in a strange hand. The hand of the other he knew well. He tore open the last. It contained these words—

"She who declines, but not ungratefully nor willingly, an offer which does her real and very great honour, can appreciate to the full your thousand admirable qualities—your lofty and generous spirit, and your truly noble heart. EMILY."

While Algernon read this letter, Alger-

non's father read Algernon. Both knew the contents of the communication—the purport of the lady's answer—equally soon.

The young man drooped his head on his chest, and leant back in the chair. The hand which held the letter hung listlessly by his side. Mr. Childering took the brief note, and read it with a sigh. A long silence ensued.

"Well, well," said the father, at last, "if so, it must be even so; you must not hang your head. I, too, feel this, my dear son. Rouse yourself. Is my sympathy nothing to you? What! are you to be thus vanquished by an event which happens every day under far more cruel circumstances? And now, listen, weigh well what I say to you. I would not oppose your union with Miss Whitsund; but still—hang it! I cannot sham!" he abruptly added—"I feel for you, my darling boy; give your old father a grasp of your hand!"

Algernon started and wrung heartily the proffered palm, but said nothing.

"Grief will have its way," continued the father, "and a sudden blighting of fond hopes is like the tooth of a serpent. But hark you, Algy, are you attending to me?"

"Yes, father," replied the youth, with an effort.

"That is right; shake off the first crushing weight. Nearly everything depends on the beginning. Beginnings are very mighty things, Algy, both for ill and for good; there is nothing so important as the beginning of anything, except the ending. Come! listen to me; in all these cases, a great deal depends on one's own self; otherwise, how is it that one person bears up, and another sinks, under the very same stroke?"

"Yes," said Algernon, inappropriately, but with a gallant attempt to recover himself, and to listen to his father; "yes; one sinks."

"How yes? If you take to hugging a disappointment into your very heart, it will bite you till it kills you. Treat it as you would an adder—cast it away. Look up, boy! Rouse yourself—shake off the whole thing; shake it off from you vigorously, mightily, desperately. My dear, dear Algy, show yourself manful!"

"I will," said poor Algy, looking up very pale, while his mouth twitched, and two big tears stood in his eyes. He tried hard to smile, but it would not serve—he covered his face with his hands.

Mr. Childering respected the young anguish, and for many minutes watched in silence an interior struggle which he could not assuage. He poured out a glass of wine for himself and another for his son, neither tasting the first, however, nor proffering the second. But when the sudden paroxysm of disappointed hope was a little relieved by the at last irrepressible outburst of tears

(greater men have wept for smaller reasons), Mr. Childering, seeking anything to turn his son's thoughts, remarked—

"But see! Here is still another letter for you!"

The mental oppression which a father's tenderness could not chase away, was destined to be quickly dispelled by a stranger's rage and malice.

"From whom can this be?" said Algernon, sighing heavily. When he took up the letter, it was evident his thoughts were far from it. Without opening it, he said—

"I told you what I dreaded before I ventured on this offer. She already had an attachment, and she preferred this young Harding, this early companion, to me. Yet she seemed to love me. Suppose she is bound by promise; that I would never ask any woman to break. Would I had only known it for certain and in time! I should then have been spared this cruel day."

"Never give names to the day till the sun is down," replied Mr. Childering. "Yours will be a long and bright day yet, my lad. Meanwhile, just read your letter."

"Private," said Algernon, breaking the seal.

His first glance was to the signature, which made him start, and presently, as he read the contents, the red blood mantled once again, warm and strong, in the cheeks it had deserted.

"Be that letter from friend or enemy," cried the delighted father, "it has served your turn, Algy! Do you know you didn't look a bit like yourself just now!"

"No very warm friend, apparently," replied Algernon; "'private' is on this precious document, or I would show it to you."

"Give the writer my compliments and thanks, whoever he is!" again exclaimed the father, more and more enraptured; "he beats me hollow in the art of consoling

a high-spirited young gentleman under his first great heart-grief."

"No secret of mine, sir, I assure you."

"Don't mention it, my dear boy!" almost shouted Mr. Childering. "I don't care a filbert what it is; it has proved a specific in your case. Providence ordered that you should get that letter in the nick of time."

"Providence orders all things," replied Algernon, "except the use men make of their will, and then Providence orders the consequences of even that. My present correspondent seems to have a will of his own, one of those wills from which very strange consequences sometimes come."

At this moment, the servant knocked (he knocked instead of entering at once, because Mr. Childering, expecting Miss Whitsund's reply to his son's offer, had given orders that they were not to be disturbed after dinner). The servant being told to come in, said—

"I beg pardon, sir; but I thought you would be angry if I did not tell you."

"What is the matter, Jones?" asked Mr. Childering.

"Poor Gilbert, the gamekeeper's boy is just come running to the hall, sir!"

"Is Gilbert dead?" cried Algernon, starting to his feet, full of solicitous animation, and so haggard all at once for another's trials that he had evidently forgotten his own.

"No, sir; he's not dead."

"Is he worse, then?"

"No, sir; he's not worse."

"Thank God! Poor Gilbert! I fired my first shot under his tuition. But what, then, is the matter? you've given me a fright."

"Ay, Algy, and me, too," said the father; "you're hard to frighten," he added, in a low tone, to himself, "except in that way. All your frights are about other people."

The son was not attending to, and did not hear, his father's muttered remark.

"I'm sorry I startled you, sir," resumed the servant; "but Gilbert's boy says that Gilbert thinks that, perhaps, you might be strolling down in his direction this evening, sir."

"Why, it was precisely for that purpose we ordered dinner so early," replied the young gentleman. "Tell Gilbert's boy that I shall certainly call this evening, and shall be there almost as soon as the lad, unless he runs. How is the wound now? I haven't seen the poor fellow these three days."

"It is a little uneasy, sir, the lad says."

"Is the wine out that we sent?" asked Mr. Childering, senior.

"No, sir; the boy says it isn't half drunk yet."

"Because," observed Algernon, "Gilbert is to be kept well supplied with good port. The doctor said so."

"You can go now, Jones," said Mr. Childering.

The servant retired, and closed the door.

"Tell Gilbert, Algy, that I'd have come with you myself to-night, only I have business, as you are well aware."

"Yes, I know—letters—this electioneering project about me."

"And, Algy, I shall have finished the letters by the time you return, and I'll wait for you. This early dinner permits a little supper. We'll have it in the library. Don't be later than eleven; I want to have a chat with you."

"Eleven! Oh! I promise you I shall return before then, since you are good enough to say you'll wait for me. You know I'm always punctual."

"Your head is a chronometer, Algy. See! you've dropped your letter. 'Twouldn't do to go without your medicine—ha! ha!"

CHAPTER VI.

"But where is he, the pilgrim of my son?
* * * * *
Methinks he cometh late, and tarries long."
Childe Harold.

ALGERNON, having run downstairs from his room (where he had exchanged his boots for a pair of stout walking-shoes), was putting on his hat and was selecting a stick from a whole armoury of such articles, stuck in the large ten-ringed stand which occupied a corner of the spacious entrance hall—when the servant, Jones, hurried towards him, and said—

"Beg pardon, sir; I forgot to mention that the person who brought the letter is waiting. Is there any answer?"

"What letter? Oh, the other letter!" said Algernon, looking up, after having pleased himself about the stick; "yes, to be sure! 'Messenger to wait,' was on the envelope. I had forgotten all about it—my fault, Jones. Let the man wait, and I'll give you an answer for him in a second."

And he walked quickly into the library (a room on the ground-floor, off the hall), where he found his father seated at the solid, colossal, old oaken-table, already busy—spectacles on—with his letters.

"Excuse me one moment, father," said Algernon, sitting down at a corner of this table, and drawing towards him some note paper; "I must just answer that other letter. I shall not be long."

'As long as you like, lad; you don't disturb me," said Mr. Childering.

Algernon read once more, and very attentively, the communication to which he was about to reply.

It so happens that I have the communication in question before me at this moment—the original, I mean, of Cuthbert Harding's letter to Algernon Childering; but, for reasons connected with Cuthbert's family, I am unwilling to give it textually.

This, however, is no matter—for it does not affect the incidents of my narrative to know either the whole purport, or the exact terms of the letter; it is enough to mention that it was a bitterly and powerfully phrased affront, and that, among other things, it concluded with a passage to this effect: that the writer was aware of the prejudice (so he called it) which had arisen against duelling, and that Mr. Childering, junior, could if he chose, shelter himself behind that prejudice, but if he had one faint remnant of manly feeling (and more to that effect), he would, it was hoped, meet the writer at what time, place, and weapons, might suit his, Mr. Algernon's, pleasure; only,

as to time, the better speed, the better courtesy.

When Algernon had gone through that polite production a second time, as has been said, he tore it up, took a pen, and wrote these words:—

"I do not know any foolish thing so wicked as that which you propose, nor any wicked thing so foolish.

"I therefore decline it.

"Don't let this, however, depress your spirits, because (take my word of honour on it), for me to meet you as you demand would be to murder you!

"ALGERNON CHILDERING."

Folding, sealing, and directing this note, he went into the hall, and told the servant to give it to the messenger.

He was then going out, when his father, opening the library door, once more cried after him—

"Till eleven, Algy!"

"Without fail, at eleven," replied the young man.

* * * * *

It was half-past ten o'clock (and a misty, moonless, windy night out of doors) when Jones entered the library, where Mr. Childering was still hard at work with his letters.

Jones was not a butler; he was more than a butler.

"Shall I disturb you, sir," said the servant, "if I lay the cloth now for supper?"

"No—there, I have done," replied the master. "What o'clock is it?" added he, drawing out his watch.

The bronze timepiece on the chimney shelf rang out the half-hour.

"Right to a second! How time flies!"

He put up his watch as he spoke, and began to pace the floor, with his hands behind him.

"What table would you like, sir?" asked Jones.

"That round one near the fireplace," said Mr. Childering; "and—it is not exactly cold, but, for July, 'tisn't warm—just light me the look of a fire—the name of a fire, Jones."

"Yes, sir. I can tell you, it's a damp, foggy night outside, sir, and Mr. Algernon will perhaps like a little fire when he comes in."

"Just so," said Mr. Childering (he was a man who spoke more to his servants than do many of his class, and servants' faces never changed at Childering Hall; Jones, too, was a confidential, attached, old servant) "just so, Jones. Mr. Algernon will like it. He'll be here precisely at eleven," added the father, with a kind of vanity: "when my boy says a thing, he does a thing; a chronometer of a head! You always found that, didn't you, Jones, when you travelled with Mr. Algernon?"

"Always, sir, except nature itself was counter, like when we had the fever in Andalusia; then we were light a bit in the head at times, and forgot things."

We had not suffered the said fever; Algernon had had it all to himself, but that was Jones's style. When travelling with his young master, he would talk of "our hotel;" he would say, "a letter for us, master Algy," or "our letters have gone, sir;" and when, after a long and venture-filled course through Europe, and beyond it, they, at last, came back to the old hall in Warwickshire, he pointed out the fact the first, with "That's the Hall, sir; I can just see our tree tops yonder."

Jones had pushed up the pendant lamp which hung directly over the great library table, had laid the other table, had lit the fire, and had placed two chairs, when the timepiece struck the three quarters.

"We'll have a little claret," said Mr.

Childering; and he turned the armchair, usually facing the library table, so as to make it face the fire. He then took a volume of Scott, and sat down to pass the remaining quarter of an hour in its perusal.

He had lost all thought of place and hour when tinkle rang forth the timepiece, and told him it was eleven by the night. Mechanically he pulled out his watch, and, for the second time that evening, exclaimed—

"How time flies!"

He put a mark in his volume, and threw it on the large table. The door opened.

"Shall I serve, sir?" said Jones, "or shall we wait a minute or two, till Mr. Algernon comes in?"

"Well," said Mr. Childering, "we'll just wait a few minutes, say five. You see, my son's watch may not be set with ours. I think we are fast."

Jones made a respectful little bow as he

silently closed the door. Mr. Childering again took up Scott, and again Scott charmed him out of all consciousness of place and hour. Yet the timepiece continued all the same to chop time up into little bits, and to fling them, as though with the click of scissors, down, down, down into an irrecoverable gulph, "the past eternity." Fast and unnoticed fell the seconds, each lopped off with its little click, falling deep and far, never more to rise—never, never more; and still Mr. Childering sat reading, absorbed, unconscious. He did not hear the door open; but he started when he heard the voice of the servant and that of the timepiece simultaneously announcing half-past eleven.

Now, for the first time, a slight, vague, scarcely discernible shade passed over the old man's countenance, as he closed his book (putting the marker in it, however), and laid it down.

"Half-past, and my son not returned! Rather odd, Jones, eh?"

"Half an hour is not very much, sir," suggested Jones, in a tone of voice more cheery than his looks.

"Now, I think it *is* much," replied Mr. Childering; "much for Mr. Algernon. Punctuality itself; a head like a chronom—— Good heavens!" burst out the old man—"if anything should have happened to him!"

"May heaven forbid, sir!" said the servant.

"But he said, 'without fail,' Jones; you remember *that*. 'Without fail, at eleven,' said he! Those were his last words in going out. And when he says that——"

The master and the servant stared at each other. Click, click, went on the timepiece.

Jones's face suddenly brightened.

"I'll tell you what it is, sir! Mr.

Algernon has, likely, found poor Gilbert worse than he thought, and couldn't leave the cottage while Gilbert was bad."

"Ah! there is something in that," said Mr. Childering; "I hope it is no more, and that he has found poor Gilbert very——"

Then, shocked at the inhuman speech, which had nearly slipped from him unawares, he reddened.

"Heaven forgive me!" continued he; "I don't know what I am saying. I'd be very sorry that Gilbert was worse. We'll give Mr. Algernon a quarter of an hour more, and, if he is not returned then, send some one down to Gilbert's to ascertain whether he is there, or when he left."

"Thomas shall go, sir, precisely at a quarter to twelve, if by that time Mr. Algernon be not come back himself."

The servant withdrew, and Mr. Childering betook himself once more to his book. It no longer charmed his thoughts, nor even

fixed them. He listened impatiently for the hall door bell; he muttered to himself fifty times over, "Very odd, can't understand it!"

Half-past eleven! No Algernon.

Three quarters! No Algernon.

"Send Thomas at once down to Gilbert's!" cried Mr. Childering, as the servant answered an impatient summons of the bell.

"He is gone, sir, these five minutes," replied Jones, and then added reluctantly: "for the timepiece *is slow*, sir."

Mr. Childering, when again left alone, found that he could not rest for a moment in one position or in one place; he thought of taking his hat, and sallying forth himself. But he might thus only miss Thomas, and delay, instead of hastening, the receipt of the news which he dreaded and desired. But, besides, Algernon himself might come back while he was away; Algernon surely might still come at any moment. So

changed was everything on a sudden, that, instead of the exclamation, "How time flies!" he repeatedly said to himself aloud, as he consulted his watch, "How time creeps!"

Twelve o'clock! No Algernon. No sound, save the click, click. Mr. Childering left the library; a gust of wind met him in the hall; the hall door was open; somebody was standing outside, with a hand stretched back, holding the door.

"Oh! it is you, Jones. What can detain that man Thomas?"

It was useless standing there. They retired. Mr. Childering re-entered the library. Half an hour afterwards, they again met each other, in the same manner, at the hall door.

"He'll be here, sir, in a few minutes now; Thomas will."

The few minutes seemed hours. One o'clock. A quarter past. At last, just as

Mr. Childering was again about to quit the library, he heard the hall door bell violently pulled, and immediately afterwards the rapid tread of feet in the hall, and the murmur of two men's voices.

He went out, and in the faces of Jones and Thomas he read anxiety and terror.

"Well, Thomas, you have been to Gilbert's?"

"Yes, sir; but they was asleep in the cottage."

"Asleep! Good heavens! Go on."

"I knocked, sir, and the old woman looked out of the upper window——"

"Well, well—and my son?"

"'Mr. Algernon!' says Mrs. Gilbert, says she; 'why Mr. Algernon left us about a quarter past ten o'clock! Isn't he at the Hall?' says she."

"Heavens! And it is now a quarter past one!" shouted Mr. Childering. "Something has happened! Jones, get lanterns,

and call up every man and lad about the place. We'll not leave a path, nor brake, nor thicket, in or near the park unsearched this night."

CHAPTER VII.

> "Like salamander, yet anew, alive,
> From flames funereal issue to the day!
> Like phœnix, from its ashen dust, revive
> The lustre of your presence pass away."
>
> KENT'S *Aletheia.*

"JONES," said Mr. Childering, "you take Thomas and another round the park, by the right; I, with these men, shall take the left; we will meet in the hollow near the Throstledale Road."

It was done accordingly. Neither of the searching parties had found Algernon; but when Mr. Childering reached the spot which he had appointed for the meeting with Jones, he observed the latter, who had arrived before him, anxiously examining a cap by the light of his lantern. It was,

beyond all doubt, Algernon's—and it was covered with mud, as though it had been trodden under foot.

"Where did you find this?"

"Why, out upon the road yonder, sir. I thought I would just cross the wall in this part, as I noticed deep footprints leading to it. I'm minded, sir——"

But Jones arrested his own words, panic stricken.

"Well—what? Why did you stop like that? What have you seen?"

"Why, it looks on the road as if there had been a struggle like, sir."

"A struggle! Alas!"

The old man said no more, but hurriedly passed the low park wall, followed by the servants bearing lanterns, with the light of which they swept the road.

Certainly, and a desperate struggle, too. The road in this spot, where it made a dip, and where there lay a quantity of soft slime,

after the late rain, was, within a compass of a few yards, ploughed with footmarks; here and there they had evidently slipped. It seemed as if five or six persons had been engaged in deadly conflict. A pool of blood shone dark red in the very middle of the road.

Tracking the footsteps a little way, they were wholly lost upon the harder rising ground, and here all further search became vain. It was perforce abandoned.

Slowly and silently the whole party, no longer divided in hope, but united in despair, returned through the pleasant glades of the park to the old Hall.

Mr. Childering had dropped his hat in stooping over the ominous traces: it had been wetted. Jones picked it up and restored it to its master, who took it absently, and so continued to hold it. He never put it on his head, and his grizzled locks blew neglected about his temples in the night

wind. During the return he uttered not one word, but looked about him in a wild, haggard, wistful manner. At length, his poor old head drooped fairly on his chest; and thus he marched, the servants hanging respectfully behind—Jones a little nearer than the rest, almost, indeed, at his master's elbow, with eyes never once removed from him, but mute and perplexed.

They had entered a dark shrubbery, which conducted to the open, rising, gravelled space before the hall door. That space surrounded, as a bay surrounds a landing pier, a lofty flight of stone steps, stone balustered. Here the moon shone down upon an island, as it were, of silvery light, amidst seas of verdant shadows.

Mr. Childering was emerging from the shrubbery upon this illumined spot, when he uttered a tremendous shout.

There, on the *perron*, or flight of stone steps, bareheaded, his fair locks, beaming

dubiously in the imperfect light, his brave young front erect, his slight figure well defined, as he leant listeningly forward, stood an apparition which made the old gentleman's blood bound in his veins.

"Why, Algernon," shouted Mr. Childering, "is that you?"

They were together in a moment.

"What has happened? Are you hurt?"

"Not hurt in the least."

"And the delay?—and your cap?"

"My cap is my only loss. The delay I will explain. Come in, and I will tell you all."

There he was mistaken. He could relate only his own part of the transaction. So far as our story is concerned, he could tell something, but not all. For that reason, the narrative must be pursued in another way, and the reader must be informed of several matters besides those which Algernon could tell his father.

CHAPTER VIII.

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

Hamlet.

THE events of that day, it seems, were not yet over; and here I cannot help pausing for one moment to notice a curious circumstance, of which everybody is vaguely conscious, and to which people generally allude, nevertheless, as to some idle fancy. There are days in the lives of all of us which we find peculiarly eventful, and call so; and there are long successions of days, the events of which, if added together, would fall short of the sum thus suddenly furnished at isolated and, apparently, capricious dates. This

remark is so familiar, and so abundantly indorsed by everybody's experience, that it would not be worth while to make it, except to introduce another, which is, that not only a certain day in thirty, or in a hundred, or in three hundred, is more full of incident than all the others put together, but, what is less intelligible, we shall find, not misfortunes merely, as Shakspeare says, but the whole of the events which love to crowd, after this fashion, in company, to be almost invariably of a family, and to have their names down under one generic term in the great book of Fate, as being kinsfolk to the bone. It is not, I repeat, good fortune and disaster alone which can lay claim to this progeny of gregarious incidents.

Nothing is trivial; and, in trying to guess what will prove the least so, we are perpetually duped. Of all the hopelessly obscure regions of calculation, that where we venture to estimate for ourselves, per-

sonally, the relative importance of diurnal occurrences, is the most habitually and the most largely dotted with our mistakes; we sow them broadcast, and with both hands, as we pass: let but a little interval of time elapse, and whoever comes that way in thought, can track us by a wide and unbroken train of blunders. Nothing, therefore, can seriously be set down as unimportant, by comparison with other things, before we have come to the sequel of each. The fraction of an inch in the depth of a man's neckcloth may affect the sit of his head as he walks through the streets that day; and this may incline him to keep his chin in the air, as people say, or just the reverse; and he may happen to see some person, or not to see him, and seeing that person, or not seeing him, makes a difference in our lounger's fate for the rest of his life.

He sees the individual; he stops; they

converse; a proposition is casually thrown out; an enterprise is undertaken; it is pursued; years are consumed in it; enormous energies are put forth; colossal results are produced; time itself shall not witness the end of them. What a man! Ah, what a man that was!

But the neckcloth? Half a dozen lay before him on that fated morning. Surely it little signified which he took; yes, it signified, though his boasted reason could not have helped him to the right choice! What we call Chance made a vast difference to our friend that day; yes, and, through him, to millions and millions of human beings till "the crack of doom." Well, it was odd, if we could only detect and hold fast the connection—it was odd! No, it was quite the reverse—it was not odd, but even; not singular, but just what every day, every hour, every instant, befalls every human being around us. Events

seem pelted about at random; yet it is not so. Events are flung so true, look you, and come whizzing so unerringly, from the Invisible Hand, that they not only hit us where we are, but would not hit us save where we are, save as we are. Held you but your crest the thousandth part of an inch higher, your arrogant front was stove into the brain, by the crash which has only made your hair stand on end with terror. Remain but the millionth part of a second longer with that despondent head sunk on your chest, effortless with unbelieving discouragement, motionless with dastard sloth, and lo! the ruin rushes down just where you are crouching.

But I might go a long way with illustrations. I have said enough to show that we are not safe, at the time, in terming one occurrence trivial in comparison with another, only afterwards. However, among so called trivial occurrences, the faint, vanishing trace

of the self-same mysterious law is detected, which our greatest poet remarks in the coming and the going of misfortunes. Small, indifferent events, as they are termed, move also in flights, like the migratory birds. You go out every morning for a month in the streets, and meet not a soul you know. One morning afterwards, you stumble in succession upon half your town acquaintance, till you almost fancy it is some organized trick, and that, after hiding for a long time, they have agreed to lie in ambush for you. The ancients were wrong in keeping only a black and a white pebble with which to mark their days; they should have had a few more colours.

It was thus with the day at which we have now arrived. After a week without any incidents except those which defy record having passed within the minds of the various persons concerned, Doctor Marlowe Harding sent for his nephew, and then a

little series of occurrences began which had not yet terminated, when Mr. Childering sat down to read his book, and to wait for Algernon's return, in the library at Childering Hall. The interview between Cuthbert and Miss Whitsund, that morning, in Doctor Harding's presence, has been related. Three letters were, in consequence of that interview, written on the same day. The reader has seen the arrival of the two first at their destination, and the writing of the third. The arrival of this last is now waited for. Both Miss Whitsund and Cuthbert addressed the same individual. The latter answered his enemy; to his friend he had nothing to say. If Cuthbert had been informed that Miss Whitsund was also, that afternoon, sending a note to Algernon Childering, Cuthbert would have deepened still further (cut though it was as with a chisel in stone) the trenchant sternness of his provocation. And again, if Cuthbert had

known what Miss Whitsund's letter to Algernon contained, Cuthbert might have suppressed his own altogether.

But it was gone, and he had to await the answer.

The distance between Childering Hall and Lea Meadows was six miles; his messenger had gone on foot; therefore, he had four hours, at least, to wait before the reply could come. But this was on the supposition, that the boy who had been sent with his note should find Mr. Algernon Childering at home, and should be at once furnished with a note in return. It was probable, Cuthbert calculated, that the young gentleman would be at the Hall, for now it was four o'clock. He would have returned from any morning excursion to dress for dinner about six. How he would deal with the letter, and whether he would require a little time to consider that point, were other questions. Cuthbert

threw in an additional hour for small contingencies, and fixed nine o'clock as the probable time of his messenger's return.

Now it so chanced, that in a newspaper which had come from London that morning, he had, after inditing and despatching his challenge, seen a reference to the proposed line of railway in which, by Mr. Bradworth's special favour, he had invested the whole of his winnings upon the recent races. Affairs seemed to have advanced with a swifter stride, and to have ripened with an earlier development, than Mr. Bradworth had promised; for that high authority had mentioned a fortnight as the period after which the shares in the line would be at a premium. Cuthbert, on reading the paragraph in question, concluded that he had not a moment to spare, if the first good opportunity for "realizing" were to find him prepared. He, therefore, had scarcely despatched his note to Algernon Childering,

when he again sat down and wrote a letter to Thomas Falconer, Esq., Lincoln's Inn, London, begging that gentleman to do him the service of finding for him some broker, to whom he might entrust the sale of certain shares. The reader will perhaps remember this Falconer; Cuthbert had alluded to him as "poor Tom Falconer," who had so soon found his level at Hazlebury; this allusion was when Geoffrey was pressing Cuthbert to go to Mandeville Park. Afterwards, again, while alone in the exquisite little bath room of that mansion, Cuthbert's thoughts had reverted to the same subject, and the same practical warning. Falconer had been an ancient of young Harding's; had preceded him a few years in life; was at Eton with him; had been in it, and was out of it, before him; and had now settled down to the bar. How untrue the expression! Mr. Thomas Falconer had risen up rather, and, with girded loins, had begun

to fight hard in life — had thrown his entire energies into the profession which he thought would, of all professions, do most justice to his scholarship, his trained abilities, his honest love of work.

Apologising for the intrusion on his old friend's time, and referring to the impossibility under which he lay of himself seeking out a broker—absent as he was from London, and ignorant of it—Cuthbert made a brief little allusion to their school friendship, hoped Falconer liked his profession, and expressed a wish to have news from him. "The march of a friend on a larger career," wrote Cuthbert, "will interest me deeply in the stagnation of this country existence."

Why, it had not been much more than a week old, that "country existence;" and it had not quite stagnated with Cuthbert. What! the start which the messenger of death had gained on him, and then the

daring ride from Huntingferry ; the preservation of a great lady's life ; the conquest of a powerful family's perpetual gratitude ; the spring with which he had planted at once and for ever his audacious young foot on a higher platform of the social scale ; the subsequent intellectual duel *à mort*, that desperate, gladiatorial conflict, in which he had tested the triply tempered steel of his nerves, not to say his wit, words, and mind, against his celebrated uncle, for a stake so vital ; the interview of that morning with the girl whom he passionately admired, and whom, in his heart, he bitterly reproached for her supposed inconstancy ; all this, and the antagonism he had unexpectedly encountered in the youth whom he so furiously styled, when communing with himself, "that Mr. Perfection ;" with the strange defiance which he had only just written, and to which he was expecting, on that very evening, such an answer as might lead to

a rather speedy and decisive settlement of all his projects; these things happened in one week! And he could write about "the stagnation of this country existence!"

Well, the words would sound full of verisimilitude; they were prescriptive words; people said that sort of thing. Country must be modest when country writes to town.

Cuthbert had finished his letter, when it suddenly occurred to him that it would not be delivered till the evening of the next day. It could not lead to any action on a broker's part till the day after that; and, where property so variable as "shares" was concerned, a day might be important.

Cuthbert, therefore (while purposing to post his letter all the same), determined that he would go to Throstledale himself early in the morning, and send a telegraphic message to his friend Falconer. Throstledale was the nearest telegraphic, although not the nearest

railway station; and Throstledale was in the same direction as Childering Hall, only further by four miles. There was a good inn close to the railway, and Cuthbert would have started at once to walk the ten miles (he could not take the pony which he had sufficiently tired in his ride that morning, to and from the rectory of *Panes cum Piscibus*); he would have started, at once, I say, to walk the ten miles, only that he felt chained by curiosity and passion to the place which he had given as his address, until Algernon's answer should arrive. "I will go to bed early," he thought, "and get up at four o'clock!" But he was to realize a wise old proverb, instead of carrying out this arrangement: "Man proposes, and Heaven disposes." It was now five o'clock; there were still four hours to wait; he knew not how to employ himself; he became restless. His father was gone to the brewery; his mother was engaged in household busi-

ness; Winny was at her lessons. Having determined what course to take about his shares, these no longer occupied his mind. Being, on the contrary, in the dark, respecting what was destined to pass between him and the youth, whose reply he now awaited, and being still more in the dark, as the reader knows, respecting what had already passed between that gentleman and Miss Whitsund, Cuthbert's conjecturing thoughts had flown before his messenger, and were already at Childering Hall. What could he do? Till the errand boy had brought him back a reply, he was unable to fix his attention upon anything else. He pictured to himself his rival receiving the letter he had written, and answering it. But he had never seen that rival. Now, we often form pictures to ourselves of persons whom we have not seen, and whose likenesses we have not seen. But hardly anybody permits himself to conjure up these mental portraits

definitely, save where they are safe from being destroyed by reality. Cuthbert went a step further, and, figuring to himself Algernon, of whose varied accomplishments he had recently heard so much—whose traces, whose very shadow, had, for several consecutive days, met him at every turn—he took a sheet of thick drawing paper and a pencil : he was an excellent draughtsman. How is he going to occupy himself? Mechanically, while the "working brain," to use Lord Bacon's expression about the hapless Sir Thomas Overbury—while the "working brain," was busy, the hand sought expressions for the thought in a language not confined in its duration to a few centuries, and in its range to one country or one race, but as universal as the imaginations of men, as permanent as the passions of humanity itself. Down on the paper, line after line, touch on touch, was shed the weird and shadowy portrait of a mere

interior vision. Absorbed, excited, Cuthbert was receiving from Algernon Childering, whom he had never seen, or, rather, from his wraith, a sitting "to have his likeness taken." The heated fancy laboured magnetically after the impalpable, the eluding lineaments. He traced not what was—*that* was not before him to study—but what *must* be; *that* was before him to study. It was an odd caprice, but if any one had caught him thus occupied—who could penetrate the absurd expectation, the wild conception? Who could convict him of any chimerical attempt? What more common than to trace fancy sketches both of field nature and figure nature? Painters frequently favour us with fancy portraits of the remarkable dead whom we long to know, the dead of whom we should wish to obtain just one glimpse. Cowardly criterion! Safe test of their divining art! No test at all, rather; the dead cannot come to rebuke, by

their look, the preposterous misrepresentation, the misleading caricature. A wonder of another sort is related (apocryphally) of Lavater, the physiognomist; he is said to have once actually accomplished what Cuthbert was here attempting. Your "clear seers," in a fine mesmeric frenzy, undertake as much every day.

There was hanging on the wall a strange, faint group, shivering in a Polar desert. They filled the dismal and ghostly foreground of a boundless, icy wilderness. It was the copy of a "mesmeric" sketch of poor Sir John Franklin and his companions, made—when there was question of one expedition more, "just one more" by a renowned "clairvoyante," in the confidence of a person who warmly advocated that humane insanity, that soft-hearted mistake. "I wish you could see them," says the gentleman. "I see them!" says the lady. Mr. William Harding had bought the conse-

quent sketch, as a curiosity. Was it less visionary than Cuthbert's manner of speeding the moments which he knew not how otherwise to hasten in their flight?

He was in the drawing-room of Lea Meadows. It was a warm and beautiful day; the windows were open; the doors of the verandah were open; you could have stepped out upon the little lawn on one side, and the still more sheltered flower garden on the other. The fragrant breath of summer came, with a gentle rustle of vine leaves, into the apartment.

Cuthbert was deaf to the sweet whisper of the leaves, blind to the enrapturing radiance and glory of the sunshine, insensible to the callow exhilaration of the air. Bent over the mysterious portrait, his whole mind was absorbed in the singular task he was attempting.

"Beauty!—but what kind?" thought he; "and fair or dark? I will throw deep

shades in. A scholar—hum! But also an artist! The lines of the head must fall gently away. And the eye? A swordsman —*there* is the eye! And the hand must go with it; Sensitive touch—the true point—the supple wrist—the delicate fingers—the deadly aim! Ha! can handle either the pencil or the rapier. Gave *her* features, her very look—and yet could feel along his blade, at Lyons, that Frenchman's whole thoughts; divined them—anticipated them —whirr, his opponent's sword—where is it? Gone, dancing in the sun, twenty feet high. Therefore, thus! But stay—is he the same who wrote the fable of 'King Must and King Cannot,' to help a sweet child's mental progress? What do I say? Mental? Her moral progress, too. Is he one and the same person? Then his forehead must be less square—this front less lionlike—this eye must be softer. There!—it is complete. Heavens! what a face!"

This singular production of the pencil is in the author's possession.

Young Harding leant back, and held out the portrait before him at arm's length ; and again he exclaimed—

"What a face ! Heavens, what a face ! I can almost pardon her ! I'll draw no more !"

He was as much alarmed by his own production as Richard by the apparitions in his sleep.

Observe now, had Cuthbert broken this rash vow, instead of keeping it, his life, you know, would have been different. I need not repeat what has been said about trifles ; we never know what is a trifle. But, at least, we sometimes know what is *not* a trifle. And art is not. Art is softening, humanising, and ennobling in its culture ; above all, art is candid ?

But Cuthbert never drew again for his amusement. It may here be observed that,

on no former occasion, had he satisfied himself with the executive success of his productions. Now, however, caught up by the unusual visions of the mind, and carried by passionate excitement beyond the egotist's low, particular firmament, he had reached another region, another "plane" (to borrow a scientific term), another "plane" of thought, and the faithful hand had fixed, in an enduring form, the fleeting and transient view from the mountain tops of a waking dream.

Enough of this. He had fallen from that height when, suddenly, his eyes were firmly blinded by two small hands, from behind the chair on which he was leaning back.

"Guess who it is!" cried a most unnatural voice.

"Who but Winny?" said Cuthbert, good humouredly; and the child bounded round, and began to look over the table. Cuthbert turned the drawing with its face downwards.

"Where were you all the morning?" asked Winny.

"At *Panes cum Piscibus*," replied he, "with Uncle Marlowe."

"Odious man!" exclaimed the child.

"Why odious? what has he done to you?" asked Cuthbert.

"He has done nothing to me," replied Winny; "but he was so cross towards you the other night."

"Oh! never mind Uncle Marlowe," returned Cuthbert—"I've forgiven him. I'll make a bishop of him, and then he'll forgive me in return."

This tickled Winny's imagination; she laughed and said—

"Forgive you for making him a bishop! He won't forgive you unless you do; but how will you do that? Can you make people bishops?"

"I couldn't make you a bishop, Winny; I might make you——"

"No," interrupted she—"you think me a fool, Cuth? I know a great deal more than you think! There are no women bishops. Aunt Marlowe will never be a bishop, never—even if uncle is."

"Then you see," said Cuthbert, "in order that I may be able to make a person something, the person must be fit for the something. If I was Prime Minister of England, I couldn't make Parson Trustemall a bishop, because he isn't fit for it; he would be such a ridiculous bishop, that I should be a ridiculous Prime Minister."

"I don't see that," replied Winny. "If you can make a person——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Cuthbert, "you do see it. I can make a pen, can't I? But I must have the right thing to make it of. I couldn't make a pen out of a stone. Ah! you understand now. Well, Winny, I can make something of you, perhaps, some day; but you must be fit to be made something

of, or I could no more do anything good for you, than I could make a pen out of a stone."

"Well, Cuth, dear, and am I not good?" repeated she. "I will try all my might, I am sure."

Cuthbert felt a satisfaction for which he had not bargained in giving this easy, casual, unpremeditated lesson, so quickly learnt, to his little sister. Had he continued always to speak thus to her, he would have had one day a pleasant recollection. But at this moment she noticed the sheet of drawing paper, face downwards on the table, and over it her brother's hand resting weightily.

"What are you hiding there?" she demanded, trying to peep under the paper.

The fiend returned, and flapped a dark shading wing over the thoughts which had been so bright a moment before. Under his hand lay the imagined likeness of the

individual whom he detested most on earth.

"Take care!" said Cuthbert, so angrily that the child recoiled. He felt sorry.

"Well, look then," added he, turning up the sketch.

"Who is that?" ejaculated the child, after a few instants of silent wonder, and still lost in evident delight.

"I do not know," said Cuthbert; "I never saw that person."

"Never saw him, Cuth! Don't tell fibs. That is an angel, then?"

"Well, when you have looked enough, tell me."

"There!" cried she.

"You said, just now, that Uncle Marlowe was an odious man," observed Cuthbert, "merely because you had seen him cross with me. But, you perceive, I have forgiven Uncle Marlowe. What would you say of a person whom I could not forgive, a real enemy of mine?"

"That he was a devil!" said she, with innocent vehemence.

"Then," continued he, "you love your brother Cuth very much?"

"Very, very much I love him!" she responded, putting an arm round his neck, a feat she was able to accomplish, inasmuch as he was sitting, while she stood.

"Are you sure it is so very much?" asked he.

"Quite, quite sure."

"Come, do you love him as much as cherries?" he demanded.

"Much, much more," she rejoined, earnestly.

"Well, I *have* an enemy, whom I have reason to hate, Winnifrid."

"Who is it? *I* hate him too," answered she.

"You'd tell!" said he.

"Never!" she replied—"never, Cuth. Who is it?"

"You have never seen him," he persisted.

"No matter—who is it? What is his name?"

"It is Mr. Algernon Childering," said Cuthbert.

"What! I heard Uncle Marlowe talking about him to Mr. Geoffrey Mandeville the night you came."

"That is the person."

"And that person has done something to you, Cuth?" she asked.

"He has done what he can never undo," replied he, gloomily.

"Then," exclaimed she, "I hate him with all my might!"

A little while since it was, "I'll try to be good with all my might." Cuthbert felt a vague compunction, he knew not why—a secret discontent, he could not at once have said with what.

At this moment, Mrs. Harding's voice was heard calling Winny, and the child left him once more alone.

The intellectual excitation under the influence of which he had produced the imaginary face and figure of a person whom he had never seen, had its revulsion, as a stone flung into the air has its fall. The higher the throw, the heavier the coming down. Cuthbert felt depressed, languid, and fatigued. The warmth of the air, the rustle of the leaves, the humming of insects, all the confused, low, tranquillizing sounds of a summer afternoon, disposed him imperceptibly to slumber. His head sank over his hands upon the table before him; and thus, leaning on the "magnetic" sketch, he closed his eyes, and almost immediately fell fast asleep.

Hardly was the light of day thus excluded from the bodily eye, when the mind began busily to light up its own interior, impalpable pageantries, and Cuthbert had a singular dream.

His mother—but much older than she then

was, her hair grey, her features wasted, the colour quite faded out of her cheeks—stood before him, like an apparition of the dead. In her left hand she held a portrait, to which she pointed with her right, while her eyes were fixed upon her son sadly and even reproachfully. Following the indication of the half-raised right hand, Cuthbert looked at the portrait. It was, in some manner, different from that which he had sketched, but he felt that it was the same subject, that of Algernon Childering. His mother spoke, but her voice was as though it had been the voice of one at a very great distance; the words reached him faintly, like words spoken with difficulty across the roar of a cataract; they seemed to come to him —and, perhaps, they came—over the torrent of intervening years.

"He," so ran her speech, "strove to benefit the child Henrietta Mandeville, who was nothing to him; he made simple, easy, and

familiar to her mind high reflections, courageous and heroic ideas of duty, to which she then was, and might long have remained, a stranger. And you—you have already sought to implant the accursed principle of hatred in the innocent heart of your own sister! What had my child, Winnifrid, done to you, that you should so very early seek to poison her young spirit with the worst of all evil passions? What am I to think of my son in comparison with this youth? What wrong have I, your mother, wreaked upon you that you should so soon try to kill my child's soul?"

This last question of his mother, and the glance by which it was accompanied, inspired him with such terror that he awoke, and, looking up, saw Mrs. Harding at a little distance, her eyes affectionately and anxiously fixed on him.

"I fear that you are not well, dear," she said.

"Oh," replied Cuthbert, still under the impression of his dream, and comparing his mother's appearance with the wan phantom which had rebuked him—"I am quite well, mother—only a frightful dream. I'm glad I am awake. What time is it?"

As he said this, he absently took out his pocket handkerchief, and a little glass phial rolled on the table before him. Mrs. Harding prevented it from falling to the ground.

"Medicine!" cried she, glancing at the phial. "Why, you must be ill!"

"No, mother, I assure you," he answered. "That phial was not intended for me. It contains the poison which I prevented Lady Mandeville from taking. I have somehow kept it as a curiosity."

"Well, dear," said she, "let us now destroy it. It is not safe to leave such a thing about."

"Give it to me," said Cuthbert. "I promise you it shall not be left about. But I

should not like to destroy it. I feel an interest in it; naturally enough, you will allow. I have asked Mr. Wilson, the chemist, all about its properties. It would have killed Lady Mandeville in ten minutes."

"But why not destroy it now?" persisted Mrs. Harding.

"I don't know," replied he. "I think I should like to keep it. It will remind me——"

"Of a noble act, Cuthbert," replied she, giving him back the phial.

The young man winced.

"Of a fortunate one, at least," he murmured.

"I call it noble," said the mother. "Your motive was to save another's life; and, to do it, you endangered your own."

Cuthbert did not dispute the first of these propositions, although he did not seem at ease; to the second he said, carelessly—

"Geoffrey Mandeville would have endan-

gered his life. I did not consider that I was endangering mine. A good swimmer deserves no great credit for venturing into the water."

It had a rather abrupt sound to say, as he did say, immediately after this—

"Were you laughing, mother?"

But he had scarcely put the question when he seemed ashamed of it; while yet his eye ranged uneasily round the apartment, as if he thought some stranger might possibly have overheard their conference.

Mrs. Harding slightly and slowly shook her head, and said something in the lowest of all possible tones, so that no ear less morbidly attentive, less nervously excited, less suspiciously and eagerly strung than Cuthbert's could have caught her words. Nevertheless, on Cuthbert's they fell as if struck by a sledge hammer—and he was literally startled, affrighted, by their import. They were merely these :—

"You should pray, dear!"

Ere he could reply, Mr. William Harding entered the room hastily, with Winny hanging on the skirts of his coat. He took out his pocket handkerchief, rubbed his forehead, said it was warm walking, and announced that he was hungry.

It was announced to him, in reply, that he was later than usual, that it was near seven o'clock, and that dinner was quite ready. "Can you spell that, Winny?" says the father. "How does it go—d-i-nner, dinner?" But Winny could not be induced to sing the required tune this time, and the family at Lea Meadows adjourned to their little dining-room.

Mr. Harding explained that, when about to return from the brewery an hour ago, who should happen to call but Mr. Brompton; and that unexpected visit had detained him.

"I suppose," said Cuthbert, "he is a very clever man?"

"Why?" asked his father.

"Because he has made so much money out of nothing."

"That is not much of a reason," said Mr. Harding. "Some cleverness, no doubt, of a certain kind is necessary; and activity, incessant activity, still more so. But what is wanted, above all, is the right constitution, or temperament. With a little intelligence, and very great activity, money is sure to come to a man—on one condition."

"What is that?" asked Cuthbert.

"That a man should adore it," returned the father—"that he should make it his god—that he should strictly treat it as our Blessed Lord tells us He desires us to treat Him—be ready to leave father, mother, brother, sister, children, and wife!"

"What! for the sake of money?"

"Yes; and his own life also. Show me the man with that kind of religion at the bottom of his heart, and I'll show you the

man to whom hundreds of thousands are pretty sure to come; but then he must not stop to enjoy them. All his enjoyment must be rigorously confined to the making of money. Let him be satisfied with that, and then he will make it, I'll warrant him!"

"But," said Cuthbert, "I hear of people who rack their brains all day and all night, in great cities—and a great city is, surely, the focus of all money making; people who show intelligence much above the average—that is one of the conditions; and who never cease scheming — that is another; and who, notwithstanding, are never out of want."

"You've named two of the conditions," said Mr. Harding; "where is the third?"

"Oh! you said wickedness, or a hard conscience, or something——"

"I said no such thing. A hard conscience is required, but every kind of hard conscience won't do."

"Ah! well! that a man must be unscrupulous," urged Cuthbert. "Well, the people I mean are unscrupulous, and starve!"

"Let them be as rascally as you please —that is not what I said; every kind of rascality won't do."

"Well, that they should," pursued Cuthbert, "make a god of money—that they should be ready to give their souls for money."

"That won't do," thundered Mr. Harding; "that is not enough!"

"Not enough!" exclaimed Cuthbert, "to be ready to give your soul for money!"

"No," said his father; "not half enough! Money requires more of a man than that; money is jealous. You must not be the man to give your soul for anything else. Now, if you more closely examine these folk of whom you speak—who are always you say, scheming, and always in want—you

will find that they have many gods: they are polytheistical idolators. They are not single-hearted in their devil-worship. One of them worships his belly altogether; another, at least his bottle; another, his vanity; so that he is for ever starting; for, it is clear, that if he expends all his gains in show, he can have nothing to reinvest. Now, Cuthbert, you see, in the start, everybody with thoroughbred pluck can hope to succeed once, though it were the hundredth time of trying; but two good starts, my lad, or, rather, an incessant repetition of good starts, amount to an exorbitant expectation. Well, another of these money-seekers dearly loves his chat and his chum; in fact, worships what is called society. None of this will do. Money requires the undivided man—a holocaust of himself; his whole time; his whole worship; his whole soul. On that condition, I repeat, the divinity will accept the slave; will come

to him and dandle him in tortures; will rock him in fires, and pat him on the head with the throb, throb, throb, of never-ceasing anxieties; and will thus stay with him sometimes all his life—sometimes not. But money is jealous; the idolater must worship neither any one thing that is good, nor any other thing that is bad; if he does, then, instead of having a single strong devil to rake his vitals and make him rich, he will have a legion of minor imps to flout in his face as they pass by, and to leave him unsuccessful, and, comparatively, unteased."

"It seems rough teasing," muttered Cuthbert, "by your account."

"Such teasing defies any account I can give of it, my lad," pursued Mr. Harding. "And there is another thing which money-making on a great scale asks for. A man must not worship his devil among minorities."

"What does that mean?" said Cuthbert.

"Why, the majority of men have agreed among themselves, in all countries, respecting the kinds of wickedness which are to pass current as an offering to the idol in their social state; and, likewise, the kinds which are not. These last are not always the worst. It is not proper, in England, to eat your grandmother: it used to be a laudable action, in certain cases, among the South Sea islanders. You could not make money either way; I merely mention it as an illustration. You might, perhaps, think slavery a bad thing. A man of business in one of the southern states of the American Union would keep this view to himself, if he wished to make money. To express it, would rather help him a little further north. A parallel of latitude—as Sydney Smith would have said—makes the money-getter's moral difference in all these cases. Morality, as such, is not necessary; but the morality

of the majority is necessary—whatever it may be."

"Do you mean to say that no good men have made immense fortunes?"

"No, I don't. I am talking of a class who are generally sure to make money, and who, alone, are sure beforehand. I do not pretend that none but such have made it. In fact, there is a class which is nearly always meritorious, among money-makers."

"Who are they?"

"Those who produce to sell. Those who buy to sell are quite distinct from them. Yet even those who buy to sell become rich, sometimes, without one low characteristic, or one mean action. All I maintain is this, that money can be made, in heaps, on certain conditions, and I have named them."

After dinner, Mrs. Harding went to sit in another room; Mr. Harding thrust his feet into his slippers, and lit his pipe.

An indifferent conversation went on for some time. At length, Cuthbert said—

"Father, I am going to make the prodigal's request, namely—to ask you to give me my portion, and let me go."

"Where do you want to go to?"

"To London; if you have not fixed on some plan for me."

"Well, Cuthbert, I have not much to spare. Years ago, I thought our little dwindled property, with the name of a country gentleman for its master, a poor lot. I wanted to increase my means, even at the forfeit of losing caste in the county. I set up this brewery; it has made me lose caste, as I foresaw—but, I'm sorry to say, it has not brought me what I should have considered a very good exchange for it, wealth. On the contrary, I am, perhaps, lower than when I started—even in a pecuniary point of view. My credit is good, but if all my debts were called in to-morrow, and if those

to whom I owe money were all to come on me together, I doubt if I am even solvent. I have sometimes thought, lately, of putting up the business and the entire interest to public auction, and thus getting rid of an old anxiety."

"Nay, according to what you say," replied Cuthbert, "that would be a bad move. If it is only by credit you swing, you must not break the branch till your foot finds ground. You cannot, I infer, spare anything for me?"

"I did not say quite that, Cuthbert. I said—not much. But what are your own wishes? what do you mean to do?"

A woman servant here entered, and gave Cuthbert a letter, which, she said, Humphrey's boy had just brought. Cuthbert looked at his watch.

"Excuse me, father," said he, and, with some eagerness, he broke the seal, and read Algernon Childering's note. His lip curled

with a cold sneer as he refolded it, and put it in his pocket. Yet it made him thoughtful.

"You see," resumed the father, "the army, as you hinted, the other night, yourself, would be absurd. There is no advancement in this country for an officer without interest, and what interest could I command? Otherwise, I admit that nothing could be more kind than Sir Walter's offer."

"What did Sir Walter say of me besides offering to get the commission secured?" inquired young Harding.

"Well, he said," replied Mr. Harding—"and I must allow that he used the most delicate terms—he as much as said, you know—in short, he made me clearly understand that he would not suffer me to be at any expense in the matter."

"Indeed!" said Cuthbert. "A very handsome offer!"

"Yes, only I cannot turn it to account for you; because the army is out of the question."

Cuthbert made no reply to this; but, soon afterwards, looking at his watch, remarked that he had something to do, and left the room. As he passed, he looked into the drawing-room, and told his mother not to expect him at breakfast next morning, for he had to be in Throstledale very early, but would be home again in the course of the day; and, meanwhile, he wished to write some letters in his own apartment; "therefore I will say, good-night," he added. He declined her offer to send him a cup of tea upstairs.

When alone, he felt unusually restless. As there was something masterful and haughty in the tone, so there was something off-hand and superior in the style of Algernon Childering's brief note. The room seemed to Cuthbert too small for him.

He threw up the window. The fine day had been succeeded by a cloudy evening; it was only the more in harmony with his mood; the slumber which had surprised him in the afternoon, forbade rest now; he determined that he would go out, and walk off his unquiet sensations. Then a new thought occurred to him. "I know I shall not sleep to-night," said he to himself; "my mind is too distracted: I shall remain tossing in bed for three or four miserable hours, after which I shall fall into such a heavy slumber, that I shall be too late for Throstledale. Stay; the inn near the railway must be open all night; passengers constantly meet the up train there at half-past two; I may as well set out this minute, and walk to Throstledale at once, like Mr. Melcombe the other evening."

CHAPTER IX.

"And soon, one indistinguishable hue
Stole o'er the variousness of hill and valley;
But yet a hum ascended, and there flew
A vague sound, which would faint and then would rally."

The Voyage of the Air.

"Startled from sleep upon the verge of doom,
With wild cry shrilling through the wilder blast,
Uprose the seamen ghostlike in the gloom."

Bulwer Lytton's *King Arthur.*

Cuthbert, accordingly, took his hat, and was about to proceed, when he suddenly remembered Mr. Melcombe's adventure. "I have no revolver," he thought; "but there is a cane-sword of my father's in the passage; I may as well take that."

Thus armed, he stole forth, and was soon

striding briskly along the high road between the two plantations, mentioned in a former chapter. On coming to the little gate, he hesitated whether he should not take the short cut. But his object was not to save time, or to abridge his walk; it was rather to pass the time, and, by violent motion to tire down the fretfulness of the mind: a very good method. He was not quite sure, besides, whether he should, by night, know the short cut, or be able to keep to it in the darkness. The little path, which disengaged itself clearly enough to view for a span's breadth, beyond the swing gate, was swallowed up by the jaws, as it were, of total obscurity, at the distance of a few yards.

"The road is better," thought he; and he pursued it accordingly. He was soon plunged in thought. "'He does not know any foolish thing so wicked,'" muttered he, with a sneer, "'or any wicked thing so

foolish.' He is one of your saints, I suppose. Then what means Geoffrey's tale about that Frenchman at Lyons? Oh, he is sorry for that, perhaps—won't be a naughty child any more. But his mysterious wind up! 'To meet me in the manner I demand would be to murder me!' Humph! why the manner was unsettled; I left the manner to him. Does he want me to think that, no matter what weapons, it would be all the same! Insolent coxcomb!"

Cuthbert had, by this time, emerged from the plantation upon a more open part of the road, and, in the dim and misty light, he observed, at a short distance before him, two figures, approaching rapidly. As they came up, he saw that they were dressed like sailors—a circumstance not very remarkable, since sailors have friends, sweethearts, and, sometimes, even their homes in the midland counties—yet still not quite so much in rule,

Cuthbert fancied, as it might be in other parts of England. Each of the men carried a short, heavy stick. They had passed him without a word, when, before they had made more than two or three paces, they stopped. On hearing the footsteps cease behind him, Cuthbert looked back, while still continuing his road. The two men had turned. He halted and faced them.

"Heh! master," cried the bigger of the two, "can you tell us how far it is from—from Huntingferry?"

"Some eighteen miles," replied Cuthbert, mechanically loosening the blade of his cane sword.

"And what o'clock is it now, master, if you please?" said the same voice.

The two men slowly and naturally made a step or two towards him.

Cuthbert, with his left hand, took out his watch, but it was so dark that he could scarcely see the figures to which the hands

pointed. Glancing up, he was in time to catch the smaller of the two men nudging his companion, and indicating something with the eye. Following the man's glance, he noticed the quaint chimney stacks of Lea Meadows standing indistinct, yet at no great distance. The cottage, in fact, was within shout, for the road, as has been already explained, made a bend here, and he had not gone so far from home as the mere distance which he had walked would have taken him by a straighter route.

"Can't see to tell you to the minute, my man," said Cuthbert, "but it must be about a quarter past nine."

The fellow had anticipated him.

"I can give you a glim, master," said he; and Cuthbert saw the blue flash of a lucifer match, as the man scratched it against the top of the matchbox. The provision seemed curious.

"We've a weary trudge, I'm thinking,"

added the big sailor, holding the light towards Cuthbert, as soon as it had become clear white.

"Exactly a quarter," said Cuthbert, glancing again hastily at his watch, and at once resuming his own road.

"Thankee, master," said the other, and, as young Harding looked back, he saw the two figures dissolve in the obscurity. They also had resumed their previous way.

"What an ill countenanced ruffian!" thought Cuthbert. "That lucifer was lighted, no doubt, to see what sort of customer I looked. But the cottage was too near; and if they caught the gleam of the gold watch, they noticed likewise the flash of the steel cane. Perhaps they will follow me, though."

He halted, and listened. No; he heard the tread grow more and more faint, and presently die in the distance. It seemed to him even as if the men ran. What, if they

were going to lurk about his father's, and attempt a burglary there this very night? He had plenty of time, he was a good runner; he should like to see whether they passed the cottage; it would be a satisfaction. He returned rapidly and softly. When he had convinced himself (according to the distance, and the speed with which he had traversed it) that now he must again hear their footsteps, he stood still. Not a sound, except the monotonous twitter of the leaves, and the occasional sweep of some large branch in the plantation, as the wind touched the trees, like the pipes of an organ, with its wandering and melancholy music. "Can they have stopped?" thought he. He should have seen them in that case, or should now see them. No human shape was visible along the straight and solitary line of road, which receded beyond the cottage, in the opposite direction. The reach of sight, indeed, was but short in the obscurity. Cuth-

bert concluded that they must have passed on, merely wondering at the rapidity of their pace. This he attributed to their anxiety to make short work of the long journey they had before them.

Dismissing the subject from his mind, he again pursued his own way; and it is curious that not once, till he had got long past the spot where he encountered the sailors, did it occur to him as possible, that they might have turned into the swing gate of the plantation and so have taken the short cut. It was a short cut back, as their road lay; not forward. He had many other things to think of. Besides, such is the mechanical effect on a person's mind of whatever he happens to be eagerly doing at the moment, that because Cuthbert was just then pursuing these men, it did not occur to him that they could be at the same time pursuing him.

Now, however, this did occur to him, and

he determined to be upon his guard. He was approaching the place where the path in question rejoined the public road. He proceeded with great caution, treading lightly, listening attentively, and watching the hedges on both sides. "How stupid of me," he said to himself, "to take it for granted that they must be sailors, just because they wore the dress. I'll be bound they are no strangers to this country, but could walk every inch of it blindfold."

As he said this, he drew the blade from the sword cane, and moved into the shadows at the side of the road; for, now, the moon had somewhat got the upper hand of the drifting clouds, and half the way lay in her beams.

He knew that, if these two suspicious specimens of sailors, who thought it needful neither to march from Throstledale to Huntingferry without a lucifer match box, nor to set out from their starting point, the

former town, till evening—he knew, I say, that, if they had taken the short cut, they must have reached the spot where it recovered the main road long before he reached it himself. What would give them a still longer advance of him was, his abrupt return upon their traces. They would, therefore, at this moment, be in wait for him; but his own delay would have already appeared to them unaccountably protracted. Were he only to creep through the hedge and sit quietly down in the shadow for a quarter of an hour more, they would give him up altogether; they would conclude that he had changed his purpose, and had either returned home, or gone somewhere off the road across country. In this very neat little calculation, two circumstances were against him; he lost sight of a contingency, which he might as well have taken into account, and he was ignorant of a fact not less important. The

contingency was this, that, inasmuch as the short cut climbed straight over the back of a hill round which the highway slowly wound, a person, proceeding by the former line, commanded, at certain open points, a view of whatever, and whoever, might be journeying along the latter. This he might have known. That which he had no means of knowing was, that the two individuals against whom he was exercising his strategy, had a comrade following them at leisure; a friend somewhat crippled, for the moment, in his marching capabilities, by the eccentric nocturnal behaviour (in his own house, too) of a Staffordshire country gentleman, living about twenty miles off, almost on the borders of the two counties, who (in reference to this third) had, one night lately, only half fulfilled the hospitable precept of the poet, for he had omitted to "welcome the coming," although he had certainly "sped the parting guest." The

guest was our sailor's friend. He was a stalwart man, but walked not, at present, with his usual agility; whereupon his amiable companions had turned towards him, and had thus expressed their views.

"Now you don't suppose that we are going to lag like you, and this country getting so hot; we shall go along, and you'll follow after."

At present however, they were anxious to spare him the anguish of meeting alone a young gentleman who carried a cane-sword as well as a gold watch, and, perhaps, other interesting articles. They would like to fall in with this gentleman again, three strong, and not too near a dwelling house. As to the delusion that he had altered his mind, or was not coming along that road at all, two pair of eyes from the brow of the overlooking hill had verified the contrary; and a couple of trees, against which the watchers leaned their backs, would have

saved their figures from standing detached against the sky, even if the wayfarer below had ever dreamt of turning his glance in that direction.

They had, at first, looked, indeed, too far forward, and when, at length, they noticed Cuthbert's figure emerge into the moonlight, much less advanced than they had expected, the taller said to the smaller—

"Look, Ben, see if he has not been after us. Well, that was attentive and kindlike; now, we'll be after him."

Meanwhile, in this duel of generalship, Master Cuthbert, in order to execute the nice plan which he had so ingeniously conceived, turned off the highway, and lay still and meditative, a little afield, but in the shadow. So replete was his head with abstracting thoughts, that even more than the intended quarter of an hour flew by.

"London is the place," muttered he; and

straightway he forgot the place where he reclined, which, however, was very interesting. It was a ferny dell, a long dried watershed. The road made a dip, which corresponded with the hollow on either hand. A watercourse had, no doubt, brawled there in ancient times, when stout men gathered round King Alfred, and Saxon fought with Dane; or, earlier still, the woad-striped savages battled with the short sworded, large bucklered Romans of Agricola or Caius Julius.

It wasn't of this Master Cuthbert was thinking, when, after a considerable interval, he looked once more at his watch, and found it ten o'clock. He rose from the damp and ferny ground to resume his walk.

But it is not in deep thought alone that time flies fast and unremarked. "Those men" had not a watch by which "to note its loss," but they had a flask to make them forget its passage. They were not tired out.

As Cuthbert passed the spot where the short cut and the road met, the place itself recalled him from his abstraction. But he passed unmolested; and now he began to walk with greater speed, and with less caution. The road was here very lonely, and far from all human habitations. The nearest he knew, by its situation, to be Childering Hall: he could barely see the great pile in the doubtful light, on an eminence about two miles distant. An increase in the number and in the size, as well as a more ornate disposition, of the timber on one side of the road, made him aware that he was coasting, so to say, the extensive park which belonged to that old mansion.

He stopped for awhile before descending a hill which he had gained into a dark hollow. The hedges close to him sparkled with the jewellery of the glowworm; and, from that little rim, so to speak, a great picture was

rolled away from his feet into the valley, and was then lifted along the face of the opposite hill, rich in trees and glades, until the Hall itself filled, and completely closed, the dim and uncertain background.

Suddenly, a red light was flung like a spear of fire across the entire landscape, and then, as though it had not parted from the giant hand which shook it, the long meteor went quivering over the green woods, while the shriek of the railway rent the stillness. Distant as was the great black mass which was whirled through the air with the speed and fury of a sorcerer's chariot—for the road which it traversed was invisible where Cuthbert stood—it made the earth tremble under his feet.

The mighty sound had scarcely passed, when two men seemed to rise out of the very ground before him, and a third, springing from the hedge on his left hand, rushed at him and endeavoured to bear him down.

This attempt was baulked simply because Cuthbert had instinctively recoiled from the sudden apparitions in his path, so that the ruffian at his side precipitated himself upon empty air. He did not pass across Cuthbert's front, in his ill-aimed spring, without receiving under the ear a left-handed blow, well paid out, which made a hundred bells ring in his skull, and which, having caught him exactly at the moment when he was off the ground, sent him, like a battering ram, endwise and head foremost against one of the men beyond. Cuthbert would have instantly turned and run from such odds, only for a circumstance which told him, far more quickly than it can be told again in words, that to run would be fatal. That circumstance was the glitter of a pistol barrel in the hand of the taller of the two front assailants. Flight could not have put him beyond reach of a bullet —flight could not even have carried him

out of point blank range. Otherwise, there is no question whatever that the old familiar plan, sanctioned by the classic example of the last of the Horatii, is the only means by which a single adversary can equalize his chances against three. It is ten thousand to one that no two, much more that no three, footpads will overtake their flying enemy at precisely the same moment; for which reason, firearms and projectiles apart, the fugitive, if resolute and alert, may always contrive to deal with them in succession, give him but a yard start, and a clear run.

In the present case, the pistol made the difference. No running, therefore, would do. Instinctively, Cuthbert would have dealt first with the man who held the pistol. But no choice was permitted him; Fate compelled what his own inclination would have urged. And Fate, indeed, in another sense, had nearly sped down the glittering

blade which now shone level as a beam from his hand. At the first glimpse of the two figures which barred his further progress along the road, Cuthbert had mechanically, and in the very act of halting, shouted at the top of his voice, had whipped out from his innocent looking stick the long, straight, three-edged, rapier-fashioned sword, and had thrown himself into the position of guard. The next instant brought up that flank enemy whose rush the motion just described had so opportunely, though unintentionally, enabled him to avoid. This was not all; duly followed the hearty, left-handed blow with which he had sent that gentleman to commence a new rush at right angles with his first, and which had put Cuthbert out of attitude for a moment; and when he was again leaning back "in guard," he perceived that it was not his friend with the pistol, but his other friend, who had received into his arms the unexpected weight of the dis-

comfited flank assailant. Out of the three, one was temporarily disabled, the other temporarily encumbered. The third was the very personage for whom Cuthbert would, in any case, have reserved his chief compliments, inasmuch as he was the bearer of the long shining barrel. Cuthbert, from the instant when he first caught the glitter, had never lost sight of this individual, whom he recognized as the sailor who, an hour ago, had been anxious to know the distance to Huntingferry, and the exact time of night. All the by-play that has been related, occurred in the twinkling of an eye; but now young Harding lunged in earnest. The spring of the panther is not more rapid. Somehow, the man had drawn inferences, from the unexpected position in which he saw his comrade cleave the air; and when he saw Cuthbert, all of a sudden, vanish from before him (the forward movement was so prodigious in its vehemence, that the ruffian

literally lost the view of it), he blunderingly and nervously swerved. That blind swerve saved his life, but his right arm was spitted through and through.

The long blade became discoloured; the whole weight of the lunge fell on his chest; and, as he was borne violently to the ground, three startling sounds cleft the nocturnal silence. These sounds mingled together in a wild and strange discord. They were the report of the pistol, discharged convulsively, and without aim, by a hand clenching itself in pain, the yell of the wounded felon, and the shrill, fierce shout or cry with which Cuthbert had made his spring.

He was dragged down by his falling adversary, and he struggled in vain to recover his feet. The man who had dropped the pistol clutched him powerfully by the throat; nor was Cuthbert, with all his youthful agility and vigour, any match in

this situation for the robber. Still the latter was losing blood, and, had but these two been engaged, young Harding would have ended by shaking off the gripe. As it was, the wounded man had the odds for him. With an oath, he exclaimed—

"Why don't you give him the knife, Ben?"

Cuthbert made a violent effort to wrench himself round, and, in consequence, the other villain partially missed his aim; the weapon which had been intended for the nape of the neck, glanced along the shoulder blade, inflicting a long, ragged, flesh wound. Again the knife was lifted, and Cuthbert saw that the third man, also, had now regained his feet. All this, I repeat, passed in a far shorter time than it has been told. Cuthbert gave himself up for lost. His situation was like that in a nightmare; he was fast locked in the grapple of one strong ruffian, and in the hand of another; while literally power-

less to move, he beheld the flash of the descending stroke, which he had no earthly means of either parrying or evading.

It is said that, in drowning, during one supreme and awful moment, like that of the flash of the lightning in its passage, the mind of a dying person passes in review his whole previous life, not in a vague summary, but with overwhelming distinctness, and according to all the minuteness of its long forgotten, but true and real particulars. Those who have been recalled from the final swoon which succeeds that solemn momentary vision—the swoon out of which the patient would have, otherwise, passed, unwakened, into death — all attest this strange and most suggestive fact. Nor ought the possibility of it to be doubted by those who have ever pondered on the wonderful swiftness, subtlety, and might of the mind, when stung into sovereign exertion by some adequate excitement.

Something of this sort occurred to Cuthbert as the swift gleam of the knife played over him for half a second in the moonlight, and then descended, like a flash of lightning, on his spine. Years crowded before his mind's eye; nay, not crowded—they rather unrolled, the miraculous rapidity of their diorama with the most exact and orderly circumstantiality. His last thought, as he involuntarily closed his eyes in despair, was his mother; he saw her reproachful and melancholy look; he saw her attitude as she pointed to the portrait of his detested rival, Algernon Childering; and then followed the nocturnal walk, the very road on which he now lay, the bank before him, jewelled with the glowworm, the pale moonlight, the ruffian form which bent over him, and the murderous dagger as it descended.

It descended, but touched him not. A light figure, contrasting with the vile group like an angel with fiends, suddenly spring-

ing into their circle, dazzled his view for an instant. He saw the assassin reel backwards under a mighty blow, and beheld, leaning over him, the face of a young St. George—full of interest and kindliness, yet luminous still with what has been well called "the light of battle," the effort of some desperate conflict. But the loss of blood had rendered Cuthbert faint, and the sudden scene vanished in total unconsciousness.

He remembered nothing, knew nothing, of what followed, until he awoke, and found himself upon a strange bed, in a strange room.

CHAPTER X.

"'And who art thou, that Heaven's august decrees
Usurpest thus?' I cried, and lo! the space
Was void!"

BULWER LYTTON'S *King Arthur.*

"On the hearthstone the lamplight is burning low,
And the sleeper is tossing him to and fro,
And the room's curious panelling creeps with beams,
Which misgivingly shimmer like ghostly dreams.

The Golden Boy.

IT will be remembered that it was in total unconsciousness young Harding took leave of the scene in which he had been surprised so abruptly, had figured so intrepidly, and, at last, had sunk so helplessly. It has been stated that his next sensation was to find himself lying on a strange bed, in a strange room.

So much he could ascertain by the hesi-

tating glimmer of a little night lamp, placed on some vague piece of furniture, the outlines of which he could doubtfully trace. Where he was, or what was the present date, he had not the remotest suspicion, beyond this, that it was, at least, night time. After a few minutes, during which his ideas came gradually back to the brain, like pigeons returning one by one, or in pairs, to the dovecote from which they have all been scared, he called out, timidly and gently—

"Who is there?"

No answer, nor had he quite realized the great silence till now. It made itself oppressive, by contrast, after this low-voiced inquiry. It was, at present, palpable; nay, in the same sense in which Milton speaks of a "darkness visible," this was suddenly become a silence audible—he felt it humming in his ears. Not much liking it, he called out once more—

"Is anybody there?"

No answer.

"It is clear," thought Cuthbert, "that it is the very dead of night, and that I am alone. Let me once more go over my plans. London is the place!"

He had scarcely entertained the reflection, when his hair bristled upon his head.

"Ha! ha! ha!"

That shrill, mocking peal, rang faintly, and, he thought, at some distance. He knew not whence it came.

He was the most dauntless of youths, but he required to see an enemy. Like all persons endowed with the really highest kind of courage, he was of a sensitive and delicate nervous organization. At present, he knew not how he had come hither, nor, indeed, where he was.

It was not without a sensation of awe that he now held his breath, and listened.

He sat up in the bed.

"This is madness!" thought he. "I

must control this. It is a downright miserable delusion!—the mere coinage of my own brain."

Cuthbert remained perfectly still, his head bent forward in a listening attitude. No sooner had he mentally used the expressions, "a miserable delusion, the mere coinage of my own brain" than once more he fancied that he heard this laugh as though replying to the thought, but far away—and with that muffled or obstructed effect which is occasioned when the person to whose voice you are giving heed, has already turned his back. Yet, if the mere sound seemed to grow feeble or remote, the tone of it—the meaning—was even more hideous. It appeared to be the very ecstasy of scorn—deliberate scorn, I say, rapt into ecstasy.

Stricken mute and motionless by horror, Cuthbert required a few seconds to recover himself.

"I could almost fancy," muttered he,

"that the abominable mouth from which that strange laugh came dribbling out, like water trickling from a dark cave, was averted, *was averted!*—as if the thing had been summoned off, and was going, but had heard my thoughts."

His hands were clenched while he thus muttered. After a moment or two, he added, more coolly—

"I don't believe in what cannot be seen or heard by my friends—by others, and I never found anybody who had heard this laugh! however distinctly it may have rung in my own ears. Except—hum! my mother, now I think of it, did seem very serious, and very sad. She knows more about all this than she said. I must have a conversation with her alone—and in confidence. She loves me. She will tell me. Perchance, a disease! 'No fool ever went mad,' they say; and, perhaps, no timid, fawn-hearted person, trembling every day at the visible,

was ever visited by these mysterious and unreal—yes," he added, breaking out of his meditative whisper, and speaking aloud—"these unreal horrors. Thus we are humbled—thus, in one way, if not in another, we are made to pay the tax of our mortality. Decidedly, I must have this conversation with my mother, which she always seems to avoid."

After a few minutes, during which he listened calmly, while the silence continued unbroken, he turned into a new but kindred train of thought.

"What a strange thing she said to me," he pursued—"what a strange idea! 'You should pray, dear.' And her voice sounded so low, and sweet, and gentle! And she looked so kindly melancholy! It is curious, too, that, long ago, when I used to—to pray, I never had these—— Nay, now I think of it, how very, very odd! The first time I heard that laugh——"

He mused deeply for many minutes.

"I remember it," muttered he, "as though it had been last evening! One day—a beautiful day it was—when I chanced to be with Tom Falconer and Geoffrey Mandeville, near the river, at Eton. It was out of bounds—ah! what a day! And Falconer was saying that he was in such spirits, for he had had a letter stating that his father was recovering—was quite out of danger. 'Ah! Cuthbert,' cried poor Tom, 'I prayed so hard for this! I don't suppose my prayers are worth much; but God is so good, you know.' And I remember saying something which made Tom fire up immediately. He had the best of the argument, too—that can't be denied. I felt it even at the time; and then I said, that, for my part, I proposed to take care of myself."

"'Exactly!' cried Tom. 'So do I; but while you fulfil this *pro*posal, it will be as well for you not to forget Whose is the *dis*posal.'

"'Why, whose but every man's own?' exclaimed I; for I was put out. Poor Tom! He appeared wonderfully shocked; even Geoffrey didn't seem to like it. Before either of them had time to answer me, I heard it. And, Heavens! one would almost suppose that this was my answer. At first I thought it had been Geoffrey or Falconer. But they were as grave as judges. They did not seem to understand me when I asked who laughed. They had evidently neither uttered a sound, nor heard one. That was the first time; and it is curious that my mother should——

"But no!" he pursued—"I don't believe in what cannot be seen or heard by others; by the friends around me, for instance, in broad daylight. Yet, which of those friends has seen or heard my own soul? and I must believe in that. Which of theirs have *I* seen or heard?"

He soon afterwards sank back upon his

pillow ; and almost immediately a deep sleep relieved him from the unwonted, or, at least, unwontedly directed, torrent of remembrance and conjecture.

When he again awoke, daylight enabled him to discern rather more of the scene around him.

CHAPTER XI.

"I knew no more. Strong as a mighty dream
The trouble seized the soul, and seal'd the sense,
I knew no more, till, in the blessed beam,
Life sprung to loving Nature for defence.
Vale, flower, fountain, laugh'd in jocund spring,
And pride came back—again I was a king."
BULWER LYTTON'S *King Arthur.*

IT was a neat, antiquated, prettily furnished, rather large, but low ceilinged apartment upon which Cuthbert, this time, opened his astonished eyes. "Where am I?" was the first question he asked himself, after that curious and even ludicrous mental process through which all of us, who ever knew a large and venture-fraught era in the chequered days of youth, have once, probably, passed in our turn, but which those

who have not, will believe impossible—that process, I mean, wherein a still more primary query has been asked, and, at length, answered by the stunned and bewildered mind.

He had gone beyond this: his busy thoughts were come, as has been said, to the "Where am I?" He recalled, one by one, the incidents—(was it of last evening?—what evening was it?)—knitting up the ravelled web of recollection, till he beheld again a long knife, like a ray of bluish light, lifted for a renewed and more fatal blow, while he was powerless to writhe himself out of its range; the sudden interposition of some powerful party—the staggering assassin—the indistinct momentary glimpse of a friendly and brilliant, but unknown, countenance—all the sequel, a dark void; or rather, the immediate sequel—as if by enchantment, this very room, this very bed—a four-poster, by-the-by—with chintz curtains, beautifully clean, out of which

soap and water had nearly washed the pattern; and, through its faded draperies, a roseate light of sunrise, which had first been filtered, and almost scented, as it passed across a little wilderness of flowers in the window.

All these, and a multitude of other details, his eyes conveyed to him as their contribution towards the solution of the question. Then it was clearly morning—and early morning; for he noticed that the light was on the increase. It promised to be a delicious day. That window was not fully closed—for, in the first place, he could distinctly perceive the perfume of the exuberant, portable garden, which was contained in the boxes and pots ranged upon its sill outside, and throwing up against the radiance of morning the most lovely of blinds, the natural filigree of intertwining little branches, tremulous leaves, and beautiful flowers, the shadows of which danced and

quivered upon the panes. He particularly detected the scent of clematis and the double geranium. In the second place, he could, with equal distinctness, hear various external sounds: the song of the birds, the whetting of a scythe at no great distance, and, still nearer, the trundle of a wheelbarrow, and the heavy tread upon gravel of a gardener's hob-nailed shoes. All seemed at peace around this pleasant room; and he gradually felt himself lulled into a half dreamy state of idle musing—into those reveries, into that agreeable haze of contemplation, so well known to convalescents. He did not care to move for some little time. He was astonished at himself for taking interest in trifles which would not generally have arrested his attention. "I am become," thought he, "another person. I have acquired a tranquillity, a philosophy, an evenness of disposition, perfectly delightful, and rather new."

He was mistaken; he had not acquired anything; he had lost something—a little blood. Breakfast would make a difference —would bring back the old man.

"A nice pheasant on the chintz curtain, that," he pursued—"humph! good design! only the tail of the bird ought not to be longer than the trunk of the tree on which she perches—that's certain!"

He felt thirsty. Looking about, he perceived, on a stand near the bedhead, a covered jug and a tumbler.

"Decidedly, I am bewitched," he muttered; "and this is the house of a friendly enchanter."

He turned to pour himself out a draught. Suddenly, he uttered a low cry. The thin, cutting lash of a whip, all alive with stings from the thicker end down to the delicate knot of whipcord which tipped its vipery tongue, seemed to have been applied knowingly to his back. He then more distinctly

recollected the grazing wound which the first blow aimed at him had given, when the knife glanced along his shoulder blade. Pursuing the examination of the furniture, his eye alighted on a chair, where he saw his clothes tidily folded. On the little pile, stained with unmistakable streaks, lay the blade of the cane sword—or, rather, half the blade, for it was snapped across; against the chair leaned the sheath—as thin, tall, black, and empty, as Don Quixote. Immediately over that chair glittered the old-fashioned brass bird's tail, which, he knew was duly continued by a brass bird's back, and, finally, by its beak, firmly biting a brass ring. The tail was in the air now, and the beak was stooping, but it was a balancing lever, and whenever that tail was pressed back to its natural and more proper position, the bird sang—in other words, the bell rang.

It rang now, and very vehemently, in

pursuance of Cuthbert's eager pressure upon the brass tail. The bird threw up its bill, and its vociferous and jangling scream was heard summoning attention in a distant part of the building. A minute or two elapsed, and then the door opened gently. Two figures entered—one was all black, except the neckcloth and hair, which were white; the other, in a loose linen jacket and loose duck trousers, was all white, except the same particulars, which were black. The former looked like a doctor, the latter like an innkeeper.

"How are we now? Pretty quiet? Pretty comfortable?" inquired the sable visitor, approaching the bed, and looking at Cuthbert.

"How are you?" responded Cuthbert; "you seem to be tolerably quiet. But I rang the bell," added he. "I want to see either a servant, or the master of this house."

"I am at your service, Mr. Cuthbert Harding," said the white figure.

"You know my name," answered Cuthbert: "who told it to you, and what is your own?"

"My name is Ezekiah Panton," said the white figure, "but I don't know the young gentleman who told me yours, sir."

"Well, Mr. Panton," resumed Cuthbert, "that is mysterious. Now, will you kindly supply me with one or two pieces of information?"

"You have but to give your orders, sir," replied Mr. Panton, "and I obey."

"You are extremely obliging, I am sure," said Cuthbert. "Now, in the first place, be so good as to tell me in what latitude and longitude I am situated at the present moment."

Mr. Panton started; he even looked amazed.

"Slightly feverish!" murmured the black figure.

"A slightly feverish latitude, sir?" answered Cuthbert; "some hot country, I suppose. It seems a very nice atmosphere, too; and I perceive, by your speech, that I have the honour of addressing fellow countrymen. Therefore, I infer that we are still within the British Empire, on which the sun never sets—ahem! But, to put my question in plainer language, I want to know precisely and exactly where the deuce I am!"

"Outskirts of Throstledale," returned the black figure.

"Pheasant room," added the white figure.

And Cuthbert, glancing round the apartment, noticed, in fact, that not the chintz curtains of the bed alone, but likewise the paper on the walls, were embellished with that marvellous representation of a pheasant, on which the tree should have been perched, rather than that overgrown gallinaceous specimen upon the tree.

"Good eating, that bird!" remarked young Harding.

"Splendid!" returned Mr. Panton, "but won't be shot till October, you know, Mr. Cuthbert Harding."

"Whenever it is," pursued Cuthbert, "it will dine twelve persons: you may tell them I said so."

Mr. Panton opened wide his eyes.

"Feverish—very feverish;" said the black figure.

"What!" cried Cuthbert, "feverish again? feverish eating, I suppose? Well, I never knew that before. And so, Mr. Ezekiah Panton," added he, "you know my name, but you don't know that of the young gentleman from whom you learnt it. What was he like?"

"Quite the gentleman, I assure you, sir," replied Mr. Panton. "He came in Lord Havisfling's carriage; and you accompanied them, sir."

"Oh, indeed! I accompanied Lord Havisfling and the—the gentleman. Don't remember it in the least, on my honour."

"Shouldn't think you would, sir; your head was gone, and it was lying, besides, on his shoulder; and then your legs were on the opposite seat of the carriage."

"Interesting position!" cried Cuthbert. "Legs on carriage seat; my head gone, and the said head on his shoulder. But on whose shoulder? On the lord's?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Panton—"on the gentleman's."

Something in the manner with which this was said, struck Cuthbert exceedingly. He pondered, perfectly mute, for about half a minute—his large, eloquent, deep, grey eye, fixed intently on his informant. Although intuitively grasping the man's hidden meaning, and even more alive to it, more conscious of it, than the speaker himself, who had uttered his words currently, paying no

very particular attention to the casual inferences which always thus hang upon the skirts of conversation—although, I say, Cuthbert was fully awake to this latent and collateral import of the answer, he affected quite the reverse, in order to "trot out" his new acquaintance—a constant and invariable practice in the keen and mighty times of his youth, and, indeed, until—but I must not anticipate.

He accordingly said to Mr. Panton—

"Then, although you don't know who this young gentleman was, you know, it seems, that, at least, he was not also a lord?"

"Not I, sir—you'll excuse me," replied Mr. Panton. "He may be a young duke, for all I know. He looked like a young prince, I am sure, or a young king, for that matter."

Cuthbert felt a thrill, or rather a shiver, run through his whole frame. Somebody,

as the gloomily poetic vulgar saying is, "had walked over his grave." The magnificent, dark, young Saul felt what he had felt before, that the sceptre of love and hope was stealing, by a force mightier than he could resist, out of his strong grasp, and passing, gliding, all gently, but irresistibly, fatefully, as he thought, into the hand of another—a successor—a supplanter. The impression was only momentary. He resumed.

"Pray tell me all you know about my arrival; but, first—a rather elementary question—what day is this? I had almost asked, what month? It was July when I was last alive!"

"Quite right, sir; and July it is still—and you not dead. 'Twas only last night you came, sir; about a quarter past eleven. You will excuse me, sir, but I thought you was just a leetle bit—— That was when I saw you stretched out; but the sight of the

blood soon put the idea of the wine out of my head. Lord Havisfling is known to love an occasional jollification dearly, and, being in his company——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Cuthbert; "suppose you give me the reflections afterwards, and the story first."

"Well, sir, it might be a quarter past eleven, when the sound of wheels suddenly startled us, stopping at the door. And this girl comes——"

"What girl?"

"Our Betsy, sir. You see, we were just upon the shut up for the night——"

"How is that? Am I not at the Railway Inn? I have been supposing myself there, and I could have sworn to you as the innkeeper; they keep open all night."

"Sir," said Mr. Ezekiah Panton, with solemnity, "this is the Sheaf and Sickle! I wouldn't demean myself to be that 'ere Railway Whistle, as he calls hisself, were it never

so! A mean, shabby, insini-ating interloper! What's his age, I'd like to know? and I here this thirty year! No; I wouldn't go to do it! I do what I'd be done by! Do you call it neighbourly, sir, to sit yourself down under a man's very nose? Not that I care —no, not that much, for the mean, toady-ing, contemptible, sneaking, good-for-nothing penny whistle. He'll be run over some day, as he comes out of his hole—you mark my words if he isn't! Whistling to the passen-gers, indeed! Sir, a railway is all very well, in its place! But whoever heard of a Railway Whistle, I'd like to know, that was ever anything of an inn? Why, the thing isn't likely. Drat him! I don't wish any man harm—far from it; quite the reverse; I know my prayers better; the ruffian! I forgive him. Oh! certainly, I do. But if I ain't run over—see if he's not some day! And serve him right. No, sir; you're not, at this moment, in 'the railway inn'—I think

not, rather! You'll excuse me, sir—thank you."

"No offence meant, Mr. Panton," exclaimed Cuthbert; "you were saying that you were just on the shut up when Betsy——"

"Why, do you imagine, sir—I just put it to your common sense, as a gentleman of this 'ere hancient shire—that they've been and got a room in the penny whistle—I humbly beg pardon," cried the landlord, correcting himself, intensely, "I mean the *Railway* Whistle—that's at all like this pheasant chamber?"

"Decidedly, I should think not, Mr. Panton!" said Cuthbert.

"You've not noticed the resemblance, sir?" pursued the innkeeper, bitterly—"No; not if I know it."

"What did Betsy say?" persisted Cuthbert.

The landlord wiped his forehead with his

pocket handkerchief, smiled slightly to his thoughts, and then, with a sudden snort, resumed.

"Well, sir—Betsy gave us a start when she said that." (Cuthbert, for fear of more episode, refrained from apprising the excited narrator that he had omitted to mention what Betsy said.) "And I found Lord Havisfling excusing hisself to the young gentleman because he couldn't let him have the carriage to go on for the doctor, for he was bound to catch the train; and then, says the young gentleman, 'I'll just run to his house,' says he; 'but first, landlord,' says he, 'pray, help me to carry this young gentleman (that was you, sir) 'to a sofa, or a bed, if you have one ready.' Well, I took you by the feet, sir, and he by the shoulders, for you seemed dead gone, sir; and he was saying, 'gently, gently,' all the way upstairs, until we placed you where you lie now, sir. It wasn't one o'clock before he came back

with Dr. Armstrong, here. But the doctor, finding you sleeping, wouldn't let you be disturbed till morning."

"I am very grateful to you, Dr. Armstrong," said Cuthbert, "and to—to all concerned."

"Well, we seem to be even better than I had hoped," said the doctor. "A dressing is all that will be needed."

"Pray, doctor, as soon as possible," said Cuthbert. "Is the station far? And what hour is it?"

"Not much more than half a mile. That is, from the other end of the little town. What hour? It is scarcely half-past seven."

"Good. In a moment I am at your service. But first tell me, Mr. Panton, what more did you hear the two gentlemen say?"

"Well, sir—Betsy heard more than I did; the women always do, I think, in these cases. It seems, from what Lord Havisfling

was observing, that the other gentleman had saved your life, sir. That was sure."

"What? the——"

"Yes, sir—the young gentleman."

"The same, do you say, who was crying 'gently' as you brought me upstairs?"

"Yes, sir, and who went afterwards for the doctor."

"Did you say, on foot? He went on foot?"

"Beyond doubt," replied Mr. Panton; "and ran. I had, of course, no conveyance ready."

"How do you know he ran? Did you see him?"

"No, sir, for I was up here with you. Beyond running down the stairs, which he took at one spring from top to bottom, I couldn't see him run. But Betsy did; for she opened the door to him, and told him the way to Dr. Armstrong's house; and she says, says she, 'Blessings on his beautiful

head, if he didn't vanish into the night, just like an angel,' says she. 'What do you know of angels?' says Mrs. Panton to her, 'you jade!' says she; 'what angels did you ever see vanish or appear either?' You understand, sir, he was a young gentleman to make the women talk, and the women will talk, sir."

"Was he so handsome, then?"

"Well, he was handsome, sir. I thought at first, from his anxiety like, that he could not be less than own brother to you, sir."

"Indeed!" said Cuthbert. "Was not Lord Havisfling, then, equally kind?"

As the name of the nobleman need not be given, this disguise will serve as well as another.

"Lord Havisfling's carriage—ha! ha! ha!" said the innkeeper, "was kind, sir. But he was off in a moment, sir. He was bound to be at the Railway Whistle, he said, by twelve o'clock, or he'd have lent

the other gentleman his whole turn out to fetch Doctor Armstrong. I shouldn't say he was half the gentleman the other gentleman was. What business had he at the Railway Whistle, I should like to know?"

"Very true, Mr. Panton. Now it will, perhaps, surprise you, considering the very bruised and discomfited state in which I have made my appearance in your excellent house, but it is a positive fact, that I am very well disposed towards anything the doctor here may kindly allow me in the nature of a breakfast."

"A little weak tea," suggested the doctor.

"Precisely," responded Cuthbert, with a grimace. "And, Mr. Panton, a couple of mutton chops or so with it, ahem! The tea not too weak, you know—not too weak. I don't feel like an invalid, either. And, landlord, I'm glad it is so early. I have a little business at the rail—I do not mean at the penny whistle—but at the telegraph

station. Could you order me some conveyance? I fear, I should make a poor attempt at walking."

"You shall have the gig, sir; and my own boy, Harry, shall drive you over."

"A thousand thanks," said Cuthbert. "Now, doctor, I am at your commands."

"And if the gentleman calls, sir," inquired the innkeeper, "I suppose you will see him?"

"What gentleman? Oh, true! But do you think he'll call?"

"Why, sir, I'm sure I don't know. He seemed like a brother to you. Only a brother wouldn't have taken half the pains, mayhap."

"As a matter of course, I will see him—if he do call," replied Cuthbert, thoughtfully. "By all you tell me, I should say——"

He paused.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Panton, expectantly.

"That he will not come," replied Cuthbert.

The innkeeper looked puzzled, and withdrew to give the various orders. When he returned, the doctor had a few others for him. But Cuthbert's wound, which was unimportant, though painful, was soon dressed.

CHAPTER XII.

"A stripling bold, with mischief in the blink
Of his keen eyes; as cunning as divine:
Now down the limpid skies his pinions sink,
Now winnow upwards where pale meteors shine."
KENT'S *Aletheia.*

IT was a beautiful morning. The railway station was three quarters of a mile from Throstledale, by a charming road, which wound between hazel woods, and high, overhanging banks. Cuthbert well remembered it, as was shown by the brief conversation which passed between him and old Humphrey on the occasion of his nocturnal arrival with Geoffrey at Lea Meadows.

After breakfast, the gig was announced by Mr. Ezekiah Panton in person, who,

moreover, accompanied Cuthbert to that magnificent vehicle, and would have helped him to mount thereon, having already thoughtfully placed cushions to support his back. The officious services thus proffered were declined. Cuthbert went round, inasmuch as the "near" side happened to be the furthest from the door, while the "off" side had been drawn up close to it; and, of course, in the loftier seat there appropriated, the driver sat already. This was Ezekiah's son and heir; a youth who had been early caught and tamed, and who looked as if he should not approve of the nineteenth century.

When Cuthbert (not with his usual ease) had slowly ascended to his place, on that tranquil-minded individual's left hand, he felt in the breast pocket of his coat for the letter to Mr. Falconer, and said—

"First, to the post-office."

"Why, that's the other way," remarked the lad.

"Is it?" replied Cuthbert. "The other way, then."

While absently making this reply, he drew out his watch, and, to his great surprise and vexation, found that it marked three o'clock. He exclaimed something to that effect, but was immediately comforted; for the intelligent driver expressed his belief that it must be yesterday's three o'clock, and that the watch had swooned off, as well as its master. "'Twarn't ten, nor nothing like it." This suited Cuthbert's arrangements to a nicety. His telegraphic message, which would arrive in London as soon as it was sent from Throstledale, would infallibly find the laborious Falconer at his chambers; there was no necessity for hurry; the broker would be produced that same day, and on the next morning, after receipt of his letter, his small first "investment" would be satisfactorily terminated.

The gig went steadily to the post-office;

then turned and went steadily towards the railway station, along the delightful country road already mentioned.

"You weren't ever run away with, were you?" inquired Cuthbert, with grave and amiable solicitude, of his companion, who, in the discharge of his duty, was shaking the reins every now and then over the cob's shiny back, and chirping encouragingly to that collected animal.

The youth looked round, saw Cuthbert's immovable and very serious countenance, and pondered a considerable time. At last he said—

"By a woman?"

"No," replied Cuthbert, with equal slowness and solemnity; "by a horse."

The lad chirped, shook the reins, and cleared his throat. He then observed silence for some time; after which, he said, most clearly—

"I warn't never run away with by a woman."

"But you were, I dare say, by a horse?" suggested Cuthbert.

"Well," responded the youthful driver, "I warn't never run away with by a horse."

"That is a good thing," remarked young Harding, with feeling.

They now proceeded in silence for about half a quarter of a mile, when the youth suddenly said—

"But Jacky Thompson war."

"Really!" exclaimed Cuthbert. "Where was that?"

"That was in Lancashire, I hear tell."

"I suppose he is a very young person," said Cuthbert.

"No, he ain't! He ain't to call young; he's near eighty," said the driver, chirping to his steed. "But he war young," he added, "once."

"When was that?" asked Harding.

"When?" replied the youth; "well,

it was before my time. *I* never seed him young."

"And when was he run away with?"

"Well, that was before my time."

"Dear me!" cried Cuthbert, and a long silence ensued.

They had steadily neared their journey's end, when an extraordinary sprightliness seized upon young Harding's companion. He chuckled, and he cracked his whip, then he said—

"But I mean to, though!"

"What! to be run away with?"

"Ah! to be run away with; see if I doan't—one o' them days."

"Pray, let me get down first," said Cuthbert.

The youth glanced round with twinkling eyes.

"'Taint by this 'ere horse. This is Bessy."

"Oh! not by Bessy? I'm glad of that."

"Noa; but by Betsy, though."

"That's the other horse, I presume?" said Cuthbert.

"No; it's the housemaid," replied that wicked young man; and the gig stopped as he spoke. "She'll bring me to crying of the banns and the *h*alter, she will—if I doan't mind."

"Oh! she'll not do it," replied Cuthbert. "You'll be able to prevent her."

This seemed to puzzle the youth; but his countenance soon cleared. What he might have said, however, was lost, for they had now arrived. He pulled up within an enclosed space, where a great many vehicles of all sorts were collected. They were waiting for a train, which was a little behind its time.

Cuthbert proceeded to the telegraph room. Being furnished, by a civil clerk, with a form, he wrote his message to Mr. Falconer, and paid for it. As he required an

answer, he asked when this might be expected.

"There is only the delay," replied the clerk, "of the messenger from Euston Square to Lincoln's Inn. If your friend be at home, we may have an answer for you in little more than an hour."

"I'll come back in an hour and a half," said Cuthbert; and he lounged towards the platform of the station.

It was littered with luggage, and crowded with porters, travellers, and servants. Bustling amongst these, Cuthbert beheld a figure which he at once recognized. A person's back has sometimes a physiognomy as well as his face. The individual was Mr. Bradworth. He turned and approached.

As he passed, his quick eye lit for a moment on Cuthbert, and he whispered in that young gentleman's ear the emphatic monosyllable—

"Sell!"

Cuthbert thought that the look implied "you are sold, if you don't." No doubt it did.

The various packages had all been, for some little time, labelled, and every proper detail of preparation was over; for the expected train was late. The consequence was, that the porters were standing idle, and the station master was looking placid, as the passengers were beginning to look the reverse. In the numerous throng, Mr. Bradworth was the only person whom Cuthbert knew, but he was not the only person whose appearance excited his curiosity; especially as there were two individuals, utter strangers to him, to whom, nevertheless, he himself seemed to be not unknown, as they, just before, were approaching him, with a peculiar expression. When they passed, he naturally followed them with his glance, and he noticed that one of the two looked round, as though the other had been

speaking about him (Cuthbert). Even without this circumstance, there were, lounging to and fro, or standing, several of those figures, concerning whom one feels inclined, at an idle moment, if in company with some person well acquainted with the scene, to ask, "Who is that—and that?"

Being in such a disposition he wished he could monopolize, for a few moments, the station master's attention, and he secured his object by a slight civility.

"You appear to know most of these persons?" said Cuthbert, halting beside that functionary, who stood a little apart, holding by the hand a small boy, who was no official, and therefore not forbidden to—in short, to do what those employed are forbidden. "Many of them are familiar to you, no doubt?" pursued Cuthbert. "Who are those two gentlemen, with a sort of military air? The one nearest us is very hollow cheeked, and pale."

"Those, sir?" replied the station master, in the same low tone—"those are Mr. Childering, junior, and Lord Havisfling (here the proper title of the last mentioned person was given). You are right, sir; they are military. Both are in ——." And he named the regiment.

"Oh!" thought Cuthbert—"that accounts for the air of knowing me which one of them had. Lord Havisfling remembers my face, from last night. It was the other—it was Childering who looked round."

"You don't mean," said he, to the station master, "that yonder sickly and spectral person is Mr. Algernon Childering?"

"Don't know his Christian name, sir," returned the other; "but he is Mr. Childering's heir."

"He is going up, now, I suppose?" said Cuthbert.

"Those two are, both of them, up tickets, sir," said the official. "Now, there goes a

remarkable person, sir, since you are curious about the passengers."

And he drew Cuthbert's glance towards a gentleman of very self-possessed manner, who was walking briskly up and down the platform. He was of small stature, rather under than over the middle height; the nose by no means a sneak, but bold and emphatic; small, sagacious eyes, an olive complexion, a thick moustache, cut to join the chin beard, like a pair of scimitars hung to guard that firm and taciturn mouth, which seldom opened. The jaws were massive, but not at all angular; they declined, by due gradations, into a grand, classic chin. Striking as was this countenance, the entire head, beautifully built and set, like that of an antique statue, upon the throat, was still more arresting to a thoughtful and discerning eye. Although the figure, as has been stated, was rather under than over the middle height, it was marvellously well knit,

buoyant, and powerful. The chest, at once deep and broad, the back straight and flat, the waist thin, the hips without a bulge, the limbs light, the step alert, all told of astonishing physical vigour, directed, probably, and moved by one of those nervous organizations in which it is impossible to calculate what they can accomplish; but, above all, what they can*not*, and will *not*, accomplish. This personage carried in his right hand a slight, flexile "dragon" cane, with which, as he perambulated the platform (the mind absent and at work), he switched his leg and foot; and, by-the-by, that foot also was remarkable, so perfect, and even delicate in form—so massive, and yet rapid in the step. It is not easy to describe the play of the cane, to which allusion has been made; it was thrown out with a shower of little jerks and curves, and then brought smartly back to the boot with a single rap. Altogether, everything about

the look and movements of this individual betrayed—character.

"Yes, I see him," replied Cuthbert, to the station master. "Who is it?"

Cuthbert was there merely to amuse himself, and pass the time till he got an answer from London to his telegraphic message. But incidents were destined to occur which turned his brief and idle saunter upon that platform into business and fatality.

Instead of replying to him, the station master rushed away from his side with a look of horror. The next moment he was startled by the screams of women, and by a burst of exclamations from the men.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Mute stood the king—when, lo! the dragon keep
Shook to its racked foundations, as when all
Corcyra's caverns and the Delphic steep
Shook to the foot tread of invading Gaul."

BULWER LYTTON, *King Arthur.*

IT has been stated that the station master (Mr. Ashby) instead of answering Cuthbert's last question, though it was a question which his own previous remark had invited, darted away abruptly, and with a look of horror. The cause was apparent at a glance. It seems that Mr. Ashby's little boy, whose left hand the father had held locked in his, when Cuthbert accosted them, suddenly found himself free, while the functionary pointed

towards the individual whose appearance was described at the end of the last chapter.

Now the child had an orange in his right hand, and he no sooner found himself released than he took advantage of the opportunity to practise a little bit of tossing and catching, an art and mystery to which he had not been long introduced, and in which his heart burned to excel. He was by no means a proficient yet. He never measured the toss with correctness, and had not even learnt to make it with moderation.

On the present occasion, little recking of a loud bell which had just rung, his energies, long pent up, revenged themselves for that confinement by an uncommonly vigorous fling of the orange perpendicularly. So he had meant; but the ascent not being perfectly straight, the descent was parabolic, and landed the orange, in the first instance, upon the forehead of the olive complexioned stranger, who, seeing the eager, upturned

gaze of the child, had, for a moment, looked up himself. The accident did not derange the gentleman in the least. On the contrary, he smiled with an amused expression. Meanwhile, the orange had rebounded upon the platform, where it was vehemently pursued by the child. Kicked by one person's foot accidentally, and knocking against another's, it rolled hither and thither, the pursuer wriggling in and out after it, among the shifting groups, with greater swiftness than judgment or success. Finally, the orange slid off the platform into the hollow tramway of the railroad itself, and was followed without hesitation by its little pursuer, who bounded down.

But why had the bell rung? A heavy train, laden with pig iron and other weighty commodities, not destined to stop at that station, had come in sight. It was at full speed, and, in that manner, with unslackened pace, was bound to pass. Already the

great roar of its rush preceded it, like the spray whipped off outridingly before a mighty sea, storm driven. Already the very platform began to quake in the first faint vibrations of that throbbing and trembling, with which it ever does homage to the powerful and terrible giant when he thunders past.

The child, all unconscious of his appalling position, had triumphantly chased the slippery fugitive to its final resting-place, right between the sleepers of the approaching engine. There had still been time for the poor little fellow, only that, in his eagerness to dart upon the orange, he struck it with his foot even as he stooped, and he fell flat. What followed occupied but two or three seconds; to tell it is another affair.

The engine driver had noticed the poor child utterly too late to arrest the rush of his machine, yet it would stop a hundred yards further down the road; he had taken

the usual measures; it was the eagerness, the absorption of the little boy himself, which was accountable for the situation. The man was seen to fling up his arms with a gesture of despair, as the dread object of which he seemed the figure head, swept up, like the sudden dilatation and advance of some monster in the magic lantern.

It was a little before this, or, indeed, it may be said that it was practically at the selfsame moment (for all took place while one could shout alarm), that every living soul upon that crowded platform became simultaneously aware that a child (unconscious of its own fatal position), lay on the very track of the speeding train. Then arose that confused, but heartrending, medley of cries, in which there mingled a woman's piercing scream.

The reader must understand that, in all these cases, the really hopeless moment, and the moment rendered practically hopeless

by nothing else than the horror of the bystanders and the panic which paralyses all action, are very thinly divided from each other. It is a nice matter to distinguish them. None but a truly eagle-eyed spirit can mark the critical line, or measure the hair's breadth of the distance. And none but a dauntless heart can act on it; can make use of that delicate vanishing perception. The chance for life turns its edge, not its blade, to the glance; and few there are that can see it. "Too late!" exclaims within itself the terror-stricken mind — and it was not too late; but ere the thought can pass away, it has become too late.

Thus it is always; nine hundred and ninety thousand, with as many hundreds, tens, and units, out of a million men, predate the fatal instant in their own horror, and make it fatal.

Yet were there, curious to say, two persons on that platform, who shared not this

otherwise universal and thorough palsying of the mind. One was the olive-complexioned stranger who has been described; but, although he could ocularly take in the scene where he stood, he was comparatively too far from it, and there were too many between him and the poor dear little boy, for any action whatever on his part. The only emotion he betrayed was in a compression of his lips, a cessation in the play of the little dragon cane, and the arrest of his march to and fro. He stood still, but he made no gesture, much less uttered any exclamation. Another, not worse in courage, was better placed.

Something had, meanwhile, shot across the road, indefinite as the shadow from a careering, hand-broad summer cloud, and, the next instant, the mighty engine and the long train went by with a thousand thunders —swift as a meteor. Cuthbert had clenched both hands, if the truth must be confessed,

and had shuddered from head to foot. On the opposite side of the railway, still within the tramway, and in the hollow road, leaning against the stone parapet which, nearly hip high, lined it, stood the handsomest youth whom Cuthbert had ever beheld, grasping what seemed a mass of clothes in his right hand. He held this mass by the back of the neck collar, and, jerking it upon the flag behind him, vaulted thither himself. The mass of clothes in question began forthwith to run about; and in one of his little hands Ned Ashby still firmly clenched the treacherous orange.

The young gentleman who had performed this feat of rescue (and who was, of course, the second of the persons to whom allusion has been made as the only two in the whole crowd that retained their coolness), was now on the wrong side of the railway, and he had again to cross it under a gaze like a battery.

He coloured violently, as he came over,

leading the child—and tried to efface himself in the crowd.

Vain attempt! A stupendous cheer arose, as if with one voice and from one heart. So, accepting the proffered grasp of the poor station master's hand — which, by-the-by, made his delicate white fingers tingle—he escaped towards a young lady and an old gentleman, the former of whom had her back, and the latter his face, turned in Cuthbert's direction. Cuthbert recognized his uncle, Dr. Marlowe Harding, and divined that the lady who was with him, and whose scream he had heard, must be Miss Emily Whitsund. He saw that the stranger, the young gentleman, appeared now to be as confused in the presence where he had precipitately sought refuge, as he had been amid the applauses of the more miscellaneous throng; and, immediately afterwards, Cuthbert lost sight of him altogether: he had disappeared from the station.

"I wonder," thought Cuthbert, "what my uncle and Emily are doing here? I'll not speak to them; but I'm hanged if I skulk! I shan't put myself out, because they happen to be in the way."

Meanwhile, the station master's first proceeding was to cuff his boy right lustily, and then to give him a very hearty kiss; after which, he repossessed himself of the tiny hand, confiscated the orange *in perpetuum*, and repaired to his former place near Cuthbert.

"You may thank Heaven for that escape!" said young Harding.

"And so I do, sir, on my bended knees," replied Ashby, as erect as a dart, without a thought of kneeling, and with great drops of perspiration on his forehead; "and I thank that young gentleman, too!"

"Who is he?" inquired Cuthbert; "I half think I have seen the face before."

"Don't know from Adam," returned

Ashby; "but as soon as ever the express goes by, I mean to find out. I'll pray for him all the days of my life. That I will! See if I don't! That's all!"

At this moment, Dr. Marlowe Harding happened to see his nephew, and bowed with uncommon formality.

The haughtiness of the salute was nothing to the haughtiness with which it was returned. Emily, turning round when she saw her guardian bow, recognized Cuthbert, and sent him, with a bend of her graceful throat, a kindlier acknowledgment, which was duly requited. She was very pale; she looked ill and suffering.

Scarcely had these distant civilities been interchanged, when Cuthbert observed the two gentlemen concerning whom he had asked the station master (they were Mr. Childering, junior, and Lord Havisfling, nor did Cuthbert for one moment confound the cadaverous-faced person before him with

that Algernon whom he had never yet knowingly seen), join Dr. Harding and Miss Whitsund. Presently, the one with the hollow cheeks and glassy eyes sauntered away; while the peer, who still remained, began to speak with much gesticulation and apparent earnestness to Emily and the doctor. Cuthbert, ere long, guessed the subject of the discourse. His uncle repeatedly held up his hands, as if in wonder, or in admiration, at what the nobleman was saying. A shifting of the groups here brought Emily's face into view. Cuthbert was surprised by the change in its expression, indeed, in its whole appearance. It glowed with blushes, and an agreeable excitement animated the eyes as she listened.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Such thoughts, when round re-echoed, like the trumpet's silver call,
Roused the valorous ambition of that mighty race of Gaul."

KENT.

"AH!" said young Harding to himself, "it was in Lord Havisfling's carriage I was brought to the Sheaf and Sickle, last night. He is naturally telling my uncle about my adventure, and Emily is pleased. But what pleases her so much? Is it my escape? Or is it the gallant and chivalrous conduct of my unknown rescuer? Unknown! not unknown to the narrator, not unknown now to the listeners. . . . If it should be this Algernon! . . . And, now I think of it, was

it he also who saved that child's life a moment ago? How is it, otherwise, that I half knew the face? Was not that the very face which bent over me in the doubtful moonlight, when the descending knife glided aside like a broken or diverted ray? Just this instant, it seemed like something I had seen, I could not recall where. Now I understand it all. But to think of my saying I would have his life, and he destined to Good heavens! . . . Yes, man *pro*poses, but not *dis*poses."

And he sadly watched Miss Whitsund as she listened to the voluble narrator.

It was while he was in this abstraction that the stranger, who had already excited his curiosity, happened to pass between him and the group. Rousing himself with an effort, he again drew the station master's attention to this person and said—

"You were going to tell me who that foreign-looking gentleman was."

Before giving the station master's answer, it will be well to anticipate an objection to what may appear to be an anachronism, but is not. The misdating, indeed, if any there were, would be only the misdating of a name, of a word, of a popular designation; the thing would remain dated rightly enough. In a former chapter old Humphrey is represented as making some allusions to the insufficiency of the rural police; now it *was* insufficient. He is represented, also, as alluding to one man who had been let out of prison on a licensing ticket, and to others who had broken prison. It need hardly be said that both of these events had frequently occurred, before popular phraseology found a term (since become almost technical) for the former case. There is a further consideration, which is this—that, as the incidents connected with the Harding before us, will come down to nearly the actual moment in which I now write,

I can with propriety avail myself of the language in which people would at present speak of what then occurred, whether a particular phrase was, or was not, in general vogue, five, or six, or even ten years ago. If I be wrong in this (and I do not think I am), the error is, at least, merely and solely an error in the writer's manner, not an error in the facts—which last, by-the-by, must presently carry us, by a bound over a few years, much nearer towards the hour now passing, than is this last to the summer morning on which young Harding sent, from the Throstledale station, his first message by the electric telegraph.

This explained, I return to my narrative.

"That foreigner-looking gentleman, sir," replied the station master, "is a foreigner like. He lived close by—that is, at Leamington, for a season—but has given up his establishment there. It is Prince Louis Napoleon Boney-parte."

"What? he who is switching his boot yonder with the thin cane, as he walks up and down?"

"Yes, sir—yonder."

Cuthbert once more perused the points of manner and appearance which have been described.

"Well," said he to himself, "I thought I had tolerably good courage, yet he never stirred a muscle during the child's escape just now. It wasn't want of interest, neither; I could see that, well enough. He looked exactly like one who had measured the distance, and who knew, at the first glance, that, where he stood, it was impossible to do anything. And how the eye glittered when he saw the rescue safely accomplished by one who was better placed!"

"Wonderful nerve!" he then remarked aloud.

"Good nerve?" responded the station

master. "I believe you! When that gentleman came first to these parts, he had never hunted, sir; and I have heard old Tewkesbury, Lord Woodburn's huntsman, say that, before the end of the very first season, not a gentleman at the Warwickshire meet rode either so bold or with more judgment—that was the identical word Tewkesbury used. If there was any one at all better than the prince, it was old Mr. Childering, who is always so tiptop mounted; none but blood horses, you know, sir. One of the young Mr. Childerings, indeed, Tewkesbury said, was nearly as forward: 'twasn't that pale gentleman yonder with his lordship, but t'other young gentleman—I forget his name."

"Mr. Algernon?" said Cuthbert.

"I think that was the name, sir, that Tewkesbury said; but I never saw him myself. He went to travel' shortly, and was generally in foreign parts—mostly, I

believe. But he rode very remarkable, according to Lord Woodburn's huntsman."

"Not so well as the prince, you say?"

"Well, pretty nearly as resolute almost, but not so judgematical, I take it. And that is a wonderful thing when you come to consider that the prince wasn't born to it, like any English country gentleman. He talks French, or some such dialect, I hear say; and you know, sir, that must go sadly against the grain of hunting."

"I never knew that," said Cuthbert.

"Well, I should say it would not be natural, you see, sir. Howsoever, that's the way Tewkesbury looked at it. 'How is a man to speak to a real thorough-bred English horse in French?' says Tewkesbury. 'Tell me that!' says he. And he put it to me very natural, I must say. 'If an English born man can't understand their lingo, isn't it a leetle too much,' says Tewkesbury, 'to ask an English horse to be pat in it all at

once? Specially a horse that won't stand no nonsense,' says he. He argufied it very cool and fair, I assure you, sir. 'Now answer me candid,' says Tewkesbury; 'would you expect a French horse to be up in English first hop?' says he. 'Horses are very clever,' says Tewkesbury, 'and when you know how to draw them out, they'll learn anything in reason; but that's rather too sharp a lesson to put the poor beasts to; why you wouldn't expect it of a Frenchman, let alone a French horse,' said Tewkesbury."

"I understand," replied Cuthbert.

"That was the huntsman's view of it, sir," resumed Ashby, "and he ought to know best, of course. But I am sure I can't say what the rights of the case may be."

Just at this moment, a few brief yet remarkable words struck on Cuthbert's ear. They formed two fragments of two conversations; but they fell under the notice of

one who was singularly capable of supplying intuitively the intromitted gaps of information, defective in amount, while significant in character. No hint, no augury, no indication, was lost on him at that age. If he failed to penetrate a mystery, it was not from dulness. A secret had no business to come near him, unless his objects were wholly uninterested, wholly uninvolved, in its discovery. Were this otherwise, let it but brush him with the skirts of its robe as it passed, and he held it till he mastered it.

It was while still thinking of the extraordinary person to whom the station master referred, and while recalling Mr. Melcombe's striking observation, "*that* man is sure some day to play a great part"; it was while coupling this remark, dropped by an eminent statesman, who not only understood what chances were on the cards, but who was besides known to be—noted, indeed, for being—a profound judge of character; it

was while coupling, I say, this remark with the impressions naturally arising from the physiognomy, air, and manner, of the individual concerning whom it was pronounced; it was just while thus mentally engaged, that Cuthbert heard a well-remembered voice utter, with a certain undefinable tone of coarseness and of muffled vulgarity, the following words—

"Sorry I should have to press you for the odd hundred."

Cuthbert started. The import of that sentence appeared to him to be exceedingly singular. He saw to whom it was addressed, and by whom it was uttered. The first thought which occurred to him he framed within his own mind somehow thus—

"That animal does not want 'the odd hundred,' as he calls it. Far from that. Very queer. . . . And to such a man! I suppose it is the money for Childering's chestnut thoroughbred."

Cuthbert now glanced towards the other —I mean towards him whom he had mentally designated as "such a man."

There was not the least irritation in the face—not the least; but there was great disdain—very great disdain. This was not all. During a single second, a change for which young Harding could not account—a change which he could not trace to any specific physiognomic cause—had come over the whole carriage and appearance of the foreigner. A something (it was, I say, momentary)—a look, an air, as it were, of authority and of weight, passed that way, and was gone. Meanwhile, the personage in question had never been other than exceedingly cool—perfectly quiet and self-possessed—phlegmatic, might almost be the word.

"To-morrow," he said (in a most unsuccessful English accent) "it will be at your banker's."

The first speaker here murmured something which Cuthbert could not distinguish, but it appeared to have been pronounced in an apologetic manner.

"Well," thought Cuthbert, "it may be bold to come to such a conclusion, but it does seem to me that the Half Million is a fool, whoever may say the contrary. A fellow like that to talk of the odd hundred in such a case! Why, he ought to have been glad of it!—ay, or of the odd thousand. He does not know the great game, after all."

The two had separated, the fat, pudgy figure slinking or shuffling off into the crowd, an accidental Money King; while the destined King of Men, as Homer has it, resumed his quick, yet quiet, march upon the platform. Strange, the juxtaposition—stranger still the contrast—speedy the severance, and natural. Between those two there was *some* difference, I rather think.

The bell had already rung, and the long-expected train was in sight, when Cuthbert heard the second of those two fragmentary conversations to which reference has been made.

Outside the little building in which the waiting-rooms were contrived, and which now offered a "thorough light," by means of its couple of opposite doors (both open), a chaise, whirled by a pair of foaming horses, had drawn up suddenly and violently. Out of it sprang a low, slight figure, with a thin Italian face, and a prudent, yet adventurous, head, quite bald, who ran through the two doors to the platform. In a moment, he was by the side of the promenader, who, although he had evidently awaited his arrival (so very nearly too late), showed no impatience, no joy, no emotion of any kind or degree.

"*A temps!*" ("in time!") said the new comer.

"*Et la cassette?*" inquired the other, phlegmatically, and in a low voice.

"*Ici,*" replied the first, touching the breast pocket of his frock coat.

They passed on while still speaking, entered a first-class carriage, and were presently careering towards London.

It has been said that Cuthbert, at this period, was very weak in his French. There happened to be, in this brief conversation, one word which he did not understand. Mentally, he made a note thereof.

The platform was now as silent and deserted as it had been, a moment ago, echoing and thronged.

There remained but the lounging porters, and the station master, still griping fast the hand of his little boy, and darting upon the chubby face, every quarter of a minute, a menacing look of love—as who should say, "This time, thou shan't escape me, thou darling criminal."

Cuthbert, for a few moments, stood musing on the broad flag pavement, under the bright sunshine of that pleasant morning in July. He still saw, in his mind, that brisk march; that upright figure; that antique head; that bold and massive, yet classic jaw; that small, calm, sagacious eye; a striking combination of features; and, so considering, he thought again of what Mr. Melcombe had said.

"Yes," pondered he, "the Half Million is but a fool, after all! He can't tell a great man when he sees him, meets him, deals with him!

"No ordinary judge is Mr. Melcombe, though," pursued he; "he is an experienced statesman, and he is a great natural mind besides; understands the materials, and understands the man; knows the chances, and knows him who is to use them. The history, the state, and the real feeling of the Pretender's country, and then the Pretender

himself—if so he is to be called. Hum! I can't get him out of my head. What a look that was he gave my precious Half Million. Decidedly, the *Half* Million is a *whole* accident."

"Talking of that gentleman, sir," here said the station master, lounging forward, "you should hear Tewkesbury."

"What! Lord Woodburn's huntsman?"

"Yes, sir; he does go on wonderful. I'm not much of a politician myself, having a family; but Tewkesbury always makes a point of reading the paper, before ever he goes to bed, so he is an authority. And I remember, when the inundations were so bad in France, a season or two ago, Tewkesbury said that Louis Philippe wasn't half a king. . . . 'How so?' said I. 'Why,' said he, 'in the first place, he should show himself among his people in time of distress, and especially where the distress is. When misfortune knocks at the doors of a

whole country side, the ruler should be seen a grappling with it there and then, as soon as ever the door is opened. 'But how can you fight against nature?' said I. 'What is all life,' said he, 'but one long fight against nature? Look at the Dutch,' said he; 'if they didn't fight against the sea, they might as well turn fishes at once; and the sea is nature, as much as a river, isn't it? I've been there,' said Tewkesbury, 'and I know what I am talking about,' said he. 'When I was out hunting with the prince,' said he, 'one day, he sighed (and he is not a man I can tell you, that sighs to please himself), because my lord mentioned the damages done six months before, along the river Lawyer, in his country. Now it is a good thing, mind you, when a prince can be found that will sigh 'cause a people cries. And, besides, I heard my lord say afterwards to another gentleman, that he proved it, did Prince Nap, as clear as two

and two make four, that, with peaceful times and leisure, all that grief and trouble could be prevented for the future; and that his uncle, the great Emperor, knew how—ay, and meant to have done it, too.' (You see, sir, Tewkesbury has read the histories of Bonaparte, and knows what sort of cattle the French are.) 'But what principally vexed this prince,' says Tewkesbury, 'was Louis Philippe not showing himself—at least, among the poor people, at that unfortunate time, and not testifying the good-will like, if he could do no more.'"

"And would this man?" asked Cuthbert.

"That's just what the huntsman says, sir. Although the prince is anything but rich, he does wonderful generous things; and he'll allow anybody, let him be the poorest creature going, to come up and speak to him. Ah! much more than if they were well to do, that I do hear!"

"And so this huntsman thinks that the person who has the place now is not fit for it?" observed Cuthbert.

Ashby nodded and replied—"And what is more, that he can't hold it long, sir. 'Only once give this gentleman a fair chance,' says he, 'and you see if he don't go in and win. He could not hunt like that in his first season,' says Tewkesbury, 'and not!'—Then he said something that I can't judge of. May be, you would understand the matter, sir, being knowledgeable about books, while I, having a family (be quiet, Ned, or you shan't get the orange again), naturally attends to my little ones."

"What is it?" asked young Harding.

"Well, sir, Tewkesbury says this. 'He is a bold gentleman,' says he, 'and he is a deep gentleman,' says he, 'and he is a gentleman,' says he, 'that poor people, and

common people, and the great general lot of people, will like, if they once come to know him; for hunt with him, of course, they can't all,' says he. 'But it is not upon that, Ashby,' says he, 'that I rests my claims; Answer true, have you, or have you not, read the history of Bonaparte?' says he. . . . 'I am free to tell you, Tewkesbury,' said I, 'that I have not read that history, having a family. I am keeping it,' said I, 'till the little ones get bigger, and begin to shift for themselves.' (That was an excuse of mine, sir; because he made me feel shamefaced with his learning). 'Well,' said he, 'did you ever see a story with 'to be continued' printed straight in your face, just when you want to read further?' 'Often,' said I; 'and I am reading one now, and it is tantalizing me out of my seven senses.' 'Well,' said he, 'the French people are exactly in that fix. Nap's work was broke off in the

middle by misfortune; and, mark my words,' says he, 'it will be taken up again, sooner or later; and whoever can come to that ere country with—*Continued from our last Bonaparte chapter* as his cry, will be very particularly, and I may say, Ashby,' says he, 'very generally welcome.' That's what Tewkesbury said, sir."

"And very remarkable it is," replied young Harding. "I would not for fifty pounds have missed your conversation."

"I feel greatly flattered, sir, I am sure," said Ashby. "I didn't know there was so much value in what I said."

"And," pursued young Harding, "not for a thousand would I have missed coming here this morning."

"A thousand pounds, sir!" cried the station master—"that's a mort of money."

"Neither much nor little," returned Cuthbert. "Neither much nor little. I must

go to the 'Whistle,' hard by, for a sheet of note paper and a messenger. I want to send a note a good way off in the country; to Sir Walter Mandeville's."

"Why, he is here, sir!" exclaimed Ashby. "That is his barouche, with the two bays, dashing into the station yard this moment; I know them well."

And as he spoke, the master of that public establishment hurried away to pay his duty to the great country gentleman whom his shire honoured, and the greater man who honoured his shire and his country.

Cuthbert was left to himself once more.

"Shall I write?" thought he. "Or shall I take advantage of this chance, and speak? I feel half afraid, and a letter doesn't colour. But it lies about, perhaps; and, besides, I should be longer in suspense. Fear is the wrong adviser to begin life with. If I tremble in setting out—no matter, pro-

vided I do set out. But I should not go far, were I to be stopped in the first steps by what I may chance to feel inwardly. Deucedly unpleasant!"

END OF VOL. II.

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